University of Alberta

THE FRESCOES OF THE CAMERA DI GRISELDA

by

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Abstract

This study focuses on a 15th century fresco cycle which was originally located at the Castello di Roccabianca near Parma, and is now displayed at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan. The study explores the sources of the narrative, the attribution of the frescoes, and considers whether Griselda resembles a particular historical woman. The study reveals that although the cycle follows the story of Griselda from Boccaccio's Decameron, it was not based on a particular literary or visual source. The fresco cycle instead involves the unique retelling of the Griselda narrative, which fits within the artistic commissions of its patron. It reflects the cultural and philosophical ideas of the time, in its use of both chivalric and humanist ideals, and fits within the conventions of courtly love governing the relationship of its patron, Pier Maria Rossi, and his beloved lady, Bianca Pelligrini.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter I

Introduction

The 15th century frescoes of the Camera di Griselda have provided many interesting problems and unanswered questions for art historians. Originally painted for a room of the castle of Roccabianca near Parma in the mid-1400s, they were removed from the castle in 1898. Nothing was known securely of their whereabouts until they were discovered in 1940 in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin.[1] They are now located in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, as part of the Civiche Raccolte (See Figs. 1-9). Although it is generally agreed that the frescoes depict the story of Griselda, many other questions remain concerning who painted the frescoes, the source or sources of the narrative, and whether the depiction of Griselda was intended to resemble or refer to any particular historical woman.

The frescoes were commissioned by the castle's owner, Pier Maria Rossi, Count of Berceto. The castle of Roccabianca, which is situated a short distance from Parma, originally belonged to the Pallavicini. The castle was given to Pietro Rossi, Pier Maria's father by Filippo Maria Visconti in 1425 after it had been ruined by fire. In 1450, Pier Maria Rossi began its reconstruction. This rebuilding was part of a larger project by the Count, who, in the late 1440s, began rebuilding and redecorating three of his major feudal holdings, San Secondo, Torrechiara, and Roccabianca.

The frescoes were originally located in the south-west tower in a squarely planned room, on the first-floor. The room has two doors on the east wall, a principal door on the north wall and there are large windows on each of the west and south walls. The frescoes covered all four walls and the vaulted ceiling was painted with astrological or celestial figures. The dating of the frescoes has always been problematic. The frescoes were once dated to between 1458 and 1465 on the evidence of the Papal seal of Pope Pius II, which reportedly appeared in one of the

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1 Cristina Giannini, "Le 'Storie di Griselda' dal Castello di Roccabianca al Castello Sforzesco," Paragone (1994): 529-533.

paintings on the north wall. However, more recent authors have argued that the seal is not sufficient evidence to date the frescoes conclusively.[2]

The narrative told in the Griselda cycle has been thought to follow the story of the Marchese di Saluzzo Gualtieri and his faithful wife, Griselda, told in the tenth story of the tenth day of Boccaccio's Decameron. In this hundredth *novella* of the Decameron, Boccaccio describes how Gualtieri is asked by his advisors and his subjects to marry and provide an heir. He agrees, but only if he is allowed to choose the woman himself. Knowing that the choice will annoy them, he chooses a beautiful local peasant girl, Griselda. He asks her father, Giannucolo, for her hand in marriage. When her father agrees, Gualtieri requires Griselda to disrobe in the presence of his entourage and be redressed in the costly marriage robes which he has brought.

Initially Gualtieri is satisfied with Griselda but after a time he begins to rebuke her. When her first child, a daughter, is born, he further tests her by telling her that the child has been taken away and implies that he had decided to have the child killed. When her second child, a son, is born, he repeats the test. Throughout these assaults on her, Griselda remains faithful to her husband and bears her sorrow with forbearance and patience.

Gualtieri, seeing this, decides to put Griselda to a final test. He bans her from the castle and sends her back to her father's house with only her petticoat. He tells her that he has decided to remarry and that she is responsible for all the preparations for the wedding feast. She complies willingly although she is deeply distressed. On the night of the wedding, when it comes time for the bride-to-be to be dressed in the wedding robes, Gualtieri reveals that he has no intention of marrying anyone else, that the young woman who was supposed to be his intended bride is in fact their daughter, and that their son is also present. The family is reunited and Gualtieri is even more impressed by the faithful Griselda.

Boccaccio's is not the only version of this popular story. He began writing his version in 1348 in Florence, finished it in 1351, and had it published as the hundredth *novella* of his Decameron. Subsequently, Petrarca wrote another version based on Boccaccio's story. In his version Petrarca reflected his interest in early humanist values which he imposed on the story of Boccaccio by emphasizing the

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2 Maria Teresa Fiorio, "Gli affreschi del castello di Roccabianca," PO II (1994): 5-10.

faithfulness of Griselda and by making her the focus of the story. As contemporaries, Giovanni Boccaccio and Francesco Petrarca both worked within the same literary tradition, but each writer held very different beliefs concerning the methods and purpose of storytelling.

Although these two versions of the Griselda story are the best known, there were other versions in the oral and written traditions of the time, attesting to the popularity of the story during this period.[3] The popularity of the Griselda story is also evident in its use as a theme in the visual arts. The story was depicted most frequently on *cassoni* or wedding chests as an exemplary nuptial theme. In addition to its illustration in *cassone* paintings, the story of Griselda was also depicted in one other fresco cycle in Pavia, thought to have been painted around the end of the 14th century, which has now been destroyed. The precise nature and source of the Griselda story depicted in the cycle from Pavia are unknown.

The origin of the version of the Griselda story that is depicted in the frescoes at Roccabianca is also uncertain. The fresco cycle is the most complete of all the artistic works of the period that make reference to the Griselda story, but it is not a faithful depiction of either Boccaccio's or Petrarca's literary versions, nor does it reflect strongly the visual tradition seen in *cassone* paintings. Those scholars who have examined the frescoes, have tended to emphasize Boccaccio as the literary source of the story outlined in the frescoes, without exploring the ways in which the story follows and deviates from the multiple sources.

The fresco cycle adheres closely to both Petrarca's and Boccaccio's basic story lines. All the major events of the plots in both versions can be found chronologically placed throughout the cycle. However, there are several choices of scenes which can be specifically related to one version and not to the other. The differences between the depiction of the narrative in the fresco cycle and the two versions by Boccaccio and Petrarca suggest that the author of the Griselda cycle chose not to strictly follow either version but rather was influenced by other circumstances.

Much of the focus of the scholarly writing on these frescoes has been on the place of the frescoes in the relationship of Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini.

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3 Cristelle L Baskins, "Griselda, or the Renaissance Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors in Tuscan Cassone Painting." Stanford Italian Review 10 (1991): 158-159.

They probably met at the court of the Visconti in Milan. Bianca Pelligrini was married to Melchiore d'Arluno, a Milanese *condottiere* or mercenary soldier, but her relationship with Pier Maria Rossi was well known. According to Lippincott, there is ample evidence from the period that Bianca Pelligrini and Pier Maria Rossi had an enduring love affair which Pier Maria Rossi celebrated through several artistic commissions during his lifetime.[4]

One of his earliest known commissions was a medal he had struck by Gianfrancesco Enzola da Parma in 1455. This medal, which was dedicated to himself, was inscribed *"Petrvs Maria De Rvbeis B'Ceti Comes Ac Tvrisciare Fondator"* (See Fig.12a). In 1457 he commissioned two further medals from the same artist. The first medal is labeled *"Divae Blanchinae Cumanae Simulacrum MCCCCLVII"* (Fig. 12c), and the second *"D Blanchine R Simulacrum"* (Fig. 12d). Both inscriptions name the portraits as those of Bianca Pelligrini. He also commissioned an undated medal from Enzola on which he had placed his own image on the front of the medal and an image of Bianca on the reverse. Like the other three medals, the figures on this medal are identifiable by the inscriptions, *"Petrvsmaria Rvbevs Bceti Co Ac Tvrisclare Fondator"* and *" Dive Blanchine R Simvlacrvm C B"*(Fig.12b).

Another of Rossi's commissions was a poem written in 1463 by Gerardo Rustici of Piacenza. The poem, which was presented to Pier Maria Rossi on New Year's Day, 1464, was entitled *Cantilena pro Potenti D. Petro Maria Rubeo Berceti Comite Magnifco et Noceti Domino*. This panegyric describes Rossi, his family and his feudal holdings. Although the poem does not describe Bianca Pelligrini directly, it does allude to her through her association with the figure of a pilgrim (*pellegrina*).[5]

When Pier Maria Rossi decorated another of his castles, Torrechiara, he had the Camera d'Oro dedicated to Bianca Pelligrini. The frescoes were probably begun in the mid 1450s. The decorations consist of frescoed lunettes and vaults above a border of terracotta tiles (See Fig.10-11). The lunettes of each of the four walls are frescoed with representations of a man and a woman engaged in courtly and chivalric rituals. Above the lunettes, in the vaulted ceiling, are depictions of Pier

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4 Kristen Lippincott, "The Astrological Vault of the Camera di Griselda from Roccabianca," The Journal of the Warburg and Courtald Institutes 48 (1985): 43-45.

5 Pezzana Angelo, Storia della Citta di Parma (Parma: Dalla Ducale Tipografica, 1837), Appendix IV, 39.

Maria Rossi's castles on a background of green fields. Standing above the castles, are four depictions of a woman. The woman has been associated with Bianca Pelligrini, since she is surrounded by many symbols associated with the Rossi and Pelligrini families.[6]

Unlike the frescoes at Torrechiara, which are clearly linked to the figure of Bianca Pelligrini through the use of symbolic references, the frescoes at Roccabianca contain more subtly disguised emblematic references to Bianca. The allusion to the figure of Bianca Pelligrini has been most clearly identified in the naming of the castle itself. While it is generally believed that Pier Maria Rossi named the castle in honor of Bianca Pelligrini, its name, literally meaning "white rock," may also be purely descriptive, referring to the whitewashed exterior of the castle.

Although the frescoes were painted in the mid-1400s, the first reference to the Camera di Griselda appears in Il Parmigiano Servitor di Piazza written by Ireneo Affo in 1796, and reprinted in part in 1837 in Angelo Pezzana's Storia della citta di Parma. In this work on the history of Parma, Affo makes brief reference to the frescoes as decorating the castle of Roccabianca. He identifies the frescoes as depicting the one hundredth *novella* of Boccaccio's Decameron and proposes dating them between 1458-1464, based on the Papal seal of Pope Pius II which is found in one of the scenes.

It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that scholarly attention again focused on the frescoes with the studies of Colasanti and Pelicelli.[7] The major focus of their discussion was on the issue of attribution, and the historical background of Pier Maria Rossi's life.

After the rediscovery of the frescoes in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin in 1940, Carlo Ragghianti wrote a two part article solely dedicated to a discussion of the Camera di Griselda.[8] Expanding on his catalogue entry, published in 1948 for the

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6 Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Pictorial legitimation of territorial gains in Emilia: the iconography of the Camera Peregrina Aurea in the Castle of Torrechiara," Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smith (Florence: Giunti Barbèra, 1985), 554.

7 Arduino Colasanti, "Due Novelle Nuziali del Boccaccio nella Pittura del Quattrocento," Emporium 19 (1904): 200-215.; Nestore Pelicelli, Pier Maria Rossi e i suoi castelli (Parma: Zerbini & Fresching Tipografi-Editori, 1911).

8 Carlo Ragghianti, "Studi sulla pittura lombarda del Quattrocento," Critica d'arte VIII 1 (1949): 31-46 and VIII 4 (1949):288-300.

exhibition entitled La casa italiana nei secoli. Mostra delle arti decorative in Italia dal Trecento all'Ottocento, Ragghianti proposed a detailed iconographical reading of the frescoes. He related each scene to the passage from Boccaccio's narrative that he thought it illustrated. He also identified the figures and the planets on the ceiling and suggested that the astrological painting on the vault was an illustration of the horoscope of Pier Maria Rossi. Furthermore, he connected the likeness of Bianca Pelligrini and Pier Maria Rossi on Enzola's medals with the frescoes of Torrechiara, and proposed a similar identification for the major figures in the Griselda frescoes.

Subsequently, there was some discussion of the frescoes in the work of local Parmese authors Lorenzi, Cattelani, and Sciolla.[9] Lorenzi and Cattelani, in a very superficial analysis, identified possible linkages between the narrative depicted in the frescoes and the life of Pier Maria Rossi. Sciolla, in his article, "Ipotesi per Nicolò da Varallo" countered the arguments made by earlier authors, including Ragghianti, and suggested the author of the frescoes might be the Cremonese artist Antonio Cicognara rather than the previously cited, Nicolò da Varallo.

Mention of the frescoes appears in the work of more recent authors, Gathercole, Mutti, and Battisti but, again, with little analytical contribution to the discussion of the frescoes.[10] In the 1981 monograph by Greci, Madruzzi and Mulazzani entitled Corti del Rinascimento nella provincia di Parma, the authors discuss the history of the area around Parma and the ruling families of the Quattrocento. They simply mention the Camera di Griselda as one of the major artistic commissions of Pier Maria Rossi.[11]

The first major contribution to the analysis of the frescoes since the work of Ragghianti appeared in 1982. Marichia Arese Simicik, in her article entitled "Il ciclo profano degli affreschi di Roccabianca: ipotesi per una interpretazione iconografica," noted a previous scholarly disinterest in the frescoes and proposed a revised look at

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9 Alberto Lorenzi, "La Storia di Griselda e Gualtieri negli affreschi del Castello di Roccabianca," Citta di Milano LXXVI (1959): 533-549.; Remo Cattelani, "Gli affreschi di Roccabianca," Gazzetta di Parma, 8 (1955): 3.; Gianni Carlo Sciolla, "Ipotesi per Nicolò da Varallo," La Critica d'Arte 78 (1966): 27-36.

10 Patricia May Gathercole, Tension in Boccaccio: Boccaccio and the Fine Arts, (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1975).; Claudio Mutti, "La Camera di Griselda," Mystic Vannus (1975): 5-12.; Eugenio Battisti, Cicli pittorici storie profane, (Milano: Touring Club Italiano, 1981).

the Camera.[12] She suggested that the fresco cycle of the walls and the paintings on the ceiling had not been looked at together in any depth and proposed an iconographic analysis of both parts of the Camera in search of a unifying theme. Although she attempted to reevaluate the Camera using more in-depth analysis, her conclusions relied upon many of the earlier assumptions made by Ragghianti concerning the literary source of the frescoes and the problem of attribution.

Following this investigation by Simicik, Kristen Lippincott focused her work on an examination of the astrological vault.[13] She suggested that the ceiling frescoes do not directly illustrate the horoscope of Pier Maria Rossi but constitute a generalized representation of the heavens, based upon constellar figures from a family of manuscripts related to the Ptolemaic Stellar Tables. She also noted that heraldic references to the Rossi family and to Bianca Pellegrini may also appear among the constellations.

Three articles on the frescoes were published in 1994. In Paragone, Cristiana Giannini published archival research concerning the negotiations between the individuals involved in the removal of the frescoes from the walls of the Camera in 1896-97 and their subsequent sale on the art market.[14] Her chronicling of the letters between the art restorers and the financial investors interested in selling the frescoes has provided important documentation of the provenance of the frescoes prior to their disappearance.

Also in 1994, Maria Teresa Fiorio and Alessandra Mordacci published two articles in PO refocusing scholarly attention on the still unresolved prominent issues surrounding the frescoes.[15] Fiorio described the history of the frescoes and the problem of attribution, while Mordacci focused primarily on the role of the frescoes in the relationship of Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini. While Fiorio's article is an historical review without critical analysis, Mordacci provides an entry point for

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11 Roberto Greci, Marilisa Di Giovanni Madruzza, and Germano Mulazzani, Corti del Rinascimento nella provincia di Parma, (Turin: Istituto Bancario San Paola di Turin, 1981).

12 Marichia Arese Simicik, "Il ciclo profano degli affreschi di Roccabianca: ipotesi per una interpretazione iconografica," Arte Lombarda 65 (1982-83): 5-26.

13 Lippincott, "The Astrological Vault,"43-47.

14 Giannini, "Le Storie di Griselda," 529-533.

15 Fiorio, "Gli affreschi," 10-11.; Alessandra Mordacci, "La storia di Pier Maria Rossi e Bianca Pelligrini," PO II (1994): 17-22.

my investigation. She suggests that to discover the relationship between Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini, art historians should not confine themselves to the available historical records, but should also explore all the visual and literary resources of the period. While I do not intend to focus solely on the relationship of the patron and his mistress, her suggestion that both the visual and literary materials be considered as part of the context for the frescoes seems valuable.

Mordacci challenges the work of earlier authors who have sought to identify a correspondence between the lives of the patron and his mistress and the major figures in the frescoes, Gualtieri and Griselda. These writers, for example, Ragghianti, Lorenzi, and Simicik, have wondered whether the particular choice of the story of Griselda for the source of the frescoes at Roccabianca reflects some specific episode in the relationship of Bianca and Rossi or whether Rossi had the paintings done to honor some reconciliation with his wife, Antonia.[16] Some have suggested that there is a resemblance between the depictions of Gualtieri and Griselda in the frescoes at Roccabianca and the portraits of Bianca Pelligrini and Pier Maria Rossi on the medals by Enzola and in the frescoes at Torrechiara.

This method of historical correspondence, raises several questions about the relationship between biography and artistic representation. The question of personal identity in work of this period has been a major focus of traditional art historical investigations. More recently, writers have contested this narrow view of identity, proposing instead that portraits are more often idealized portrayals of the values held by the artist/beholder. Elizabeth Cropper for example, relates this view to the tradition of Renaissance lyric poetry, which can be read at several levels, since such poems typically included both a poetic statement about love in the abstract, and veiled references to a specific "beloved lady."[17] Courtly convention, the contemporary ideal of beauty, and allegorical rhetoric are often interwoven and hard to separate from the historical individual represented. Cropper's description of the representations of the beloved lady in lyric poetry and in paintings can be related to

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16 Carlo Ragghianti, "Pittura lombarda del Quattrocento," 42.; Alberto Lorenzi, "La Storia di Griselda e Gualtieri negli affreschi del Castello di Roccabianca," Citta di Milano LXXVI (1959): 533-549.; Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca," 5-26.

17 Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Women: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," In Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Sexual Difference. ed. M. Ferguson, M. Quilligan and N. Vickers. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 175-190.

the figure of Griselda through her similar thematic position as a beloved lady within a narrative structure. Boccaccio and Petrarca's versions of Griselda clearly represent the double potential of such figures as both real and ideal women. In Petrarca's interpretation of Boccaccio's Griselda, her allegorical representation is made quite evident. Petrarca was able to transform a vernacular narrative about wordly individuals into a poetic allegory aimed at convincing readers to follow Griselda's example of faith and constancy in their own devotion to God.

An alternative reading of the Griselda frescoes, therefore, might place more emphasis on discovering the poetic ideals represented by the women associated with Pier Maria Rossi, and less emphasis on simple biographical matching. To this end, I propose to examine the relationship among all of Pier Maria Rossi's identifiable artistic commissions, both written and visual. I will also explore these relationships against the cultural conventions and political ideologies of the period.

Chapter 2

The Patron, the Frescoes and their History

The Rossi family was first documented living in the area around Parma in the 1100s.[18] They became an important land-holding family in the 1300s when they acquired the castle of Berceto in 1331, and succeeded in gaining control of a large part of the area south of Parma. In 1365 the Rossi family acquired their family seat, San Secondo, and the castle of Torrechiara. In these early years the Rossi did not hold a secure rule over these territories and they were constantly at war with the rival families of the Terzi and the Pallavicini.[19] However, by the 1450s when Francesco Sforza became Duke of Milan, Pier Maria Rossi had built up a strong power base and become the sole overlord of a large part of the Parmense.

Pier Maria Rossi was born to Pietro Rossi and Giovanna Cavalcobò in 1413 at Berceto.[20] He came from a military family who had a tradition of working for the court of Milan. His grandfather, Bertrando Rossi had worked for Giangaleazzo Visconti as a *condottiere* and an ambassador. The tradition of service was continued with Pietro Rossi, Pier Maria's father, who also served the Visconti family.

In 1428, at the age of fifteen, Pier Maria Rossi married Antonia Torelli of Guastalla, the daughter of Guido and Orsina Torelli, the Count and Countess of Montechiarugolo. For his father, Pietro Rossi, this marriage to the daughter of another established landowner of a minor noble family was a way of strengthening his ties within the Visconti court and widening his own sphere of political influence. Through the lands which Antonia brought into the marriage, Pier Maria Rossi, became overlord of a substantial portion of the Parmense. For Antonia's father, Guido Torelli, the marriage also brought important benefits. An important landholder in his own right, he sought to align himself with two of the major ruling

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18 Pelicelli, Pier Maria Rossi, 48-50.

19 Woods-Marsden, "Pictorial legitimation," 558.

20 Pelicelli, Pier Maria Rossi, 1.

families in the region through the marriage of his daughter to a member of the Visconti court, and of his son Cristoforo to a lady in the Este court in Ferrara. This relationship, in turn, gave Pier Maria Rossi closer links with the Este ruling family.

In 1447, Filippo Maria Visconti the Duke of Milan died without heir. The people of Milan sought to set up a municipal council as the new government but they needed military protection. A local *condottiere*, Francesco Sforza, who had married Bianca Maria, Filippo Maria's only daughter, was able to use this opportunity to eventually establish himself, in 1450, as the new Duke of Milan. This family became the ruling dynasty for several generations.

The period of instability between 1447 and 1450, immediately following the death of Filippo Maria Visconti, also provided an opportunity for Pier Maria Rossi. He had aligned himself with Francesco Sforza and was able to gain additional land when the Sforza duke came to power.[21] However, while the new duke had to contend with many different problems, Pier Maria Rossi concentrated on expanding his own landholdings so that, by 1450, he had become one of the most important *condottiere* owning one fifth of the land around Parma.[22]

The castle of Roccabianca, twenty-seven kilometers north of Parma on the flood plain of the river Po, was one of Pier Maria Rossi's older holdings. The castle had changed owners several times before it was given to the Rossi. In 1425, Filippo Maria Visconti gave Roccabianca to Pier Maria Rossi's father and the castle passed to Pier Maria Rossi on his father's death in 1438. Pier Maria began constructing Roccabianca in 1450 on the site of an earlier fortification called Rezinoldo, and it was completed by 1463.[23] The period of the re-building of Roccabianca is relatively consistent with the re-building of Rossi's other two major holdings, San Secondo and Torrechiara.

Pier Maria Rossi's reconstruction of the castle at Rezinoldo was part of a campaign to create strategically placed military strongholds throughout his territory.[24] He rebuilt the castle around an internal tower or *mastio*, which had been

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21 Woods-Marsden, "Pictorial legitimation," 558.

22 Ibid.

23 Greci et al., Corti del Rinascimento, 84.

24 Woods-Marsden, "Pictorial legitimation," 558.

left following the fire in 1417. The castle was reconstructed on a rectangular plan with a central courtyard containing this *mastio* and with two towers placed diagonally opposite each other on the south-west and north-east corners of the building. The main castle had three levels; the towers, while of the same height as the main building, had only two levels, these ground floor rooms having a ceiling height equivalent to two levels. The *mastio*, the central tower, had six levels from which one could see over the surrounding countryside to the river, Po.[25] The work on the castle was completed in 1463 and Pier Maria renamed it Roccabianca.

Pier Maria Rossi, Count of Berceto, probably met Bianca Pelligrini of Como, wife of Melchiore d'Arluno, at the court of Milan, where he was in the service of Filippo Maria Visconti during the 1440s. In a testament of 1464 Rossi declared the castle of Roccabianca, as well as the villages of Arzenoldo and Fontanelle di Pizzo, property of Bianca Pelligrini, declaring that, in the case of her death, these would pass to her son Ottaviano. In 1467, he donated the castle and all of its revenues to Bianca Pelligrini for her lifetime.[26]

Pier Maria Rossi also had six sons and two daughters of his marriage to Antonia Torelli. Antonia, lived at the Rossi family castle of San Secondo until 1455 when she moved to Parma, to a family home of the Torelli located beside the monastery of San Paolo where she resided until her death in 1468.[27] At the time of his own death in 1482, Pier Maria Rossi returned his wife Antonia Torelli's dowry to her family and left capital and major holdings to Bianca and her two children, Ottaviano and Francesca. In his earlier will of 1464, Pier Maria Rossi had left the castles, Bosco di Corniglio and Roccaferrara, to his son Bernardo. The castles of Corona, Neviano dei Rossi, San Andrea oltre Taro, and Roccalanzona were divided between Guido and Bernardo, and Guido was left Felino.[28] To each of his other two legitimate sons, Pier Maria Rossi left a yearly payment and the responsibility to have masses said in honor of Bianca Pelligrini in the chapel of Torrechiara. To his daughters Leonara and Donella, Pier Maria Rossi left dowries for them on the event

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25 Greci et al., Corti del Rinascimento, 84-90.

26 Woods-Marsden, "Pictorial legitimation," 556-557.

27 Mordacci, "La storia," 18.

28 Pelicelli, Pier Maria Rossi, 44-64.

of their marriages. Following a public trial, two of his legitimate children, Giacomo and Giovanni, were disinherited because of threats against their father.[29]

In 1477, at the behest of Bona of Savoy, the mother and guardian of seven year old Giangaleazzo Maria Sforza (1476-1494) who ruled as his regent with the aid of the Privy Council, Pier Maria Rossi was named the principal deputy governor of the state of Milan.[30] This alignment with the Duchess and her son brought Pier Maria Rossi into conflict with Ludovico Sforza, Il Moro, Giangaleazzo Maria's uncle. Rossi's expanding territorial empire and the independence of his actions were seen as threatening by Ludovico who, in 1479, seized control of the Council and ruled in Giangaleazzo Maria's name. In the following year, the Duchess fled the city, after Ludovico had Cicco Simonetta, leader of the Privy Council executed, and his brother exiled. In 1482, he began a campaign to challenge Pier Maria Rossi's power as overlord and to destroy his holdings.[31] In the ensuing conflict, many of Pier Maria's castles were conquered. Although Lorenzo de Medici wrote to Pier Maria on March 28, 1482, asking him to reconsider the situation and reconcile with Ludovico, he refused to capitulate. Pier Maria Rossi, who had fled to the countryside, died the same year, in 1482.

Although the castle of Roccabianca was essentially a military stronghold, one room on the ground floor of the south west tower was decorated. Its walls were frescoed with the Griselda story and its ceiling was covered with astrological imagery. While many of Pier Maria Rossi's other castles were partly destroyed, Roccabianca survived almost intact. Only the exterior walls of the moat were taken down and little of the interior was destroyed. There was no damage to the frescoes or to the Camera di Griselda.

Following the death of Pier Maria Rossi, the castle was immediately captured by the Pallavicini, who for many years struggled with other local noble families over its ownership. The Pallavicini were sole owners of the castle by 1806, when the

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29 Giacomo Manfredi, "Considerazioni sul testamento del Conte Pietro Maria Rossi di San Secondo," Archivio storico per la provincie parmensi, 6 (1954): 88.; Woods-Marsden, "Pictorial legitimation," 563.

30 Pelicelli, Pier Maria Rossi, 76.

31 Woods-Marsden, "Pictorial legitimation," 563.

French used the castle as a military base. Following the removal of the French troops in 1808, the Pallavicini regained control of the castle and retained ownership until 1901 when the castle was sold into private hands.[32]

Before selling the castle itself, Adalberto Pallavicino sold the frescoes of the Camera di Griselda separately, in 1896 to an art dealer, Gugliemo Galli, and his two financial partners, Emma Richards and Gaetano Scribani.[33] With the help of an art restorer, Giuseppe Steffanoni, and his sons, Galli planned to remove the frescoes from the castle and sell them as quickly as possible in the antique art market.

Although delayed by the length of time involved in organizing such an operation, Galli was successful in removing the twenty-four frescoes from the walls by the end of 1897. In November of that year, Steffanoni brought the frescoes to Florence to be sold. In February of the following year, the frescoes of the ceiling were also removed and sent to Florence.[34] There are no further references to the frescoes but there is notification of the transportation of frescoes fitting the description of the Camera di Griselda from the residence of Domenico Serra to the Galleria Sabauda in Turin in 1922. The next record of them appears at the Galleria Sabauda in Turin in 1940, when they were found by a Professor Aru, who brought them to the attention of Carlo Ragghianti, a specialist in Lombard painting.

The frescoes, which were first exhibited in Florence in 1948, were purchased by the Castello Sforzesco in Milan in 1955.[35] Today, the frescoes, which have remained intact and with minimal damage despite their disappearance and transportation, have been remounted on metal supports and are on permanent exhibition in a reconstruction of the Camera di Griselda.

The frescoes are located in a square room of 7.6 m. with walls 7.6 m. high and with a two-story domed ceiling reaching 8.6 m. from the floor to its apex. These dimensions are the same as those in the original location in which there were two small doors located on the east wall and one larger door on the north wall. On the

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32 Greci et al., Corti del Rinascimento, 93.

33 Giannini, "Le Storie di Griselda," 529-533.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

south and west walls there are large recessed windows. Both windows would have looked out over the grounds of the castle.[36]

The work, which covers all the walls from approximately one meter above the floor, consists of twenty-four scenes located on two levels, one above the other, and forming a continuous cycle. There are six scenes on each of the north and east walls. On the west wall, because of one of the windows, there are only four scenes. On the south wall, with the recessed window, there are five scenes on the walls and three in the alcove surrounding the window (Fig. 1).

The first scene in the cycle is located on the wall above the window, and the cycle proceeds in a clockwise direction around the upper level until it reaches the window again. The sequence then continues in the same direction, moving first to the two scenes in the alcove above and to the west of the window and then going around the bottom level and ending at the scene in the alcove to the east of the window.

Each scene is approximately 225 cm. square and the top halves of the scenes on the upper register are semicircular and are connected by an interlaced border of brown and black to the twenty-four compartments of the vault. The scenes on the walls are separated by a similar border, and between the upper and lower scenes is a plain double border with inscriptions.

The inscriptions, written in Italian, are not as well preserved as the figural imagery. In many places, especially in the upper register, the writing has been totally obliterated. In the lower register, the inscriptions are in better condition, but now only fragments of words and phrases can be deciphered. With only these small pieces left, the relationship between the written inscriptions and the pictorial scenes is difficult to determine.

Although each scene is self contained, there are six of these compartments on the lower register where, within the overall border, two separate scenes are represented. These scenes are often related either, by an action that is happening contemporaneously, or by an action in the second scene that happens as a result of that in the first scene.

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36 Greci et al., Corti del Rinascimento, 85.; Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca," 5.

The ceiling vault is divided into twenty-four compartments and contains illustrations of eighty-seven celestial figures. Like the walls, the ceiling is painted in *grisaille*, and the predominant color is green with small details in brown or red. In the centre of the ceiling is an attached stucco sun. The constellations of the northern sky are located in the four quadrants which surround the central sun. Adjoining these, are eight quadrants which contain the constellations of the southern sky. The remaining twelve triangular compartments which link the ceiling to the walls each contains a zodiacal figure or planetary divinity.

The fresco cycle begins directly below the astrological illustration of the Sun in Leo with the *impresa* which, according to Lippincott, may illustrate the position of Pier Maria Rossi's natal star.

Scene 1 The South Wall: Upper Register, Centre.

This indoor scene takes place in a room where one wall is paneled, and the other has a diamond shaped checkerboard design. Gualtieri the protagonist is seated with his courtiers standing behind him and to his right. One of his courtiers holds a hunting bird on his arm. They are facing a group of five older men in long garments. Gualtieri is in conversation with these men, his subjects, one of whom seems to be speaking to him.

Scene II The South Wall: Upper Register, Right.

This scene also takes place indoors but in a different room with a small square paneled design on the walls and a tiled floor in checkerboard design. Gualtieri, who is holding a thin staff, possibly a symbol of his authority, is seated on a chair facing the viewer and to his right are four courtiers one of whom holds a hunting bird. Three hunting dogs accompany them. A man, who may be identified as Griselda's father, Giannucolo, wearing a ragged tunic and holding a cap in his right hand, bends slightly to talk in Gualtieri's ear. Gualtieri has turned his head to listen.

Scene III The West Wall: Upper Register, Left.

In a room with panels similar to those in the first scene, a man bends over a table cutting out fabric while Gualtieri and his four courtiers stand to the left of the table watching him work.

Scene IV The West Wall: Upper Register, Right.

Gualtieri, who is in the centre of the scene, rides in the company of many courtiers. Some are walking alongside but most follow on horseback. His horse, and

those of others, wear decorative bridles and halters. A line of trees fills the background.

Scene V The North Wall: Upper Register, Left.

Gualtieri and his company of men on horseback enter the scene from the left and overtake Griselda, on the right in the foreground as she is barefoot, walking and carrying two wooden pails on a yoke over her shoulder. The foreground is of rutted earth with small plants growing in it and the background is of large trees.

Scene VI The North Wall: Upper Register, Middle.

Gualtieri who has dismounted, approaches Giannucolo as he is coming out of his house. Griselda is behind him, inside, visible through a window. All but one of Gualtieri's retinue remain on horseback and fill the scene to the left. The house is a simple, flat-roofed structure with an archway for the door and a simple arched window on the facing wall. Trees fill the background.

Scene VII The North Wall: Upper Register, Right.

This scene takes place outside the house. Griselda, in the right centre foreground, is shown naked and about to be clothed by one of the noblewomen who stand behind her. Gualtieri and his company stand at her right, looking on while Giannucolo stands behind her, turning away.

Scene VIII The East Wall: Upper Register, Left.

Gualtieri places a ring on Griselda's left hand as Giannucolo stands between them and holds Griselda's wrist. In the background noble women stand to Griselda's left and behind Gualtieri and Giannucolo, his men look on. In the background, five musicians play trumpets, drums and other musical instruments.

Scene IX The East Wall: Upper Register, Middle.

Gualtieri and Griselda ride on horseback. Like the others, Griselda's horse wears a decorative bridle and halter, but she rides sidesaddle. Gualtieri looks at Griselda and holds her wrist as they ride. They are accompanied by Gualtieri's men, both walking and on horseback.

Scene X The East Wall: Upper Register, Right.

This indoor scene takes place in a room with a checkerboard floor and small square panels on the walls. Griselda and Gualtieri are seated in the foreground at the right end of a diagonally-placed table with four other noble men. The table is covered with a cloth, and there are dishes with food and utensils on the table in front of each

one. Behind them, men stand and play musical instruments. Gualtieri turns toward Griselda and takes her hand.

Scene XI The South Wall: Upper Register, Left.

In this indoor scene, two men play backgammon at one end of a table while at the other end, Griselda and Gualtieri play cards. In the background is a boy servant and a courtier with a bird in his hand who stands talking to another man.

Scene XII The North Wall: Lower Register, the Ceiling of the Doorway.

Griselda lies in bed resting after having given birth to her daughter. The baby is being swaddled in cloth and placed in a basket by one of Griselda's women. Gualtieri sits at her right shoulder with his hand on her shoulder. He smiles as he looks at the child.

Scene XIII The South Wall: Lower Register, Right Side of the Doorway.

Gualtieri, placed in the center of the scene, looks out towards the viewer with his right hand raised. To his right is a courtier holding a staff. On his left are Griselda and two other women, one of whom is holding their baby daughter. Griselda, smiling, looks down at her child. Unlike his expression in the previous scene, Gualtieri's expression looks serious.

Scene XIV The South Wall: Lower Register, Right.

This scene is portrayed in two parts. The first episode on the left takes place indoors and shows Griselda handing her baby daughter to one of Gualtieri's servants. Behind these two figures, watching the action, stands a woman. This indoor room is separated by a wall from the remainder of the scene which takes place outdoors.

In the right part of the scene, Gualtieri and a courtier look on as the servant hands the baby to a man on horseback. This man is part of a larger company of men on horseback.

Scene XV The West Wall: Lower Register, Left.

Like the previous scene, this scene is made up of two parts. The left episode shows Griselda lying on her side in bed as two women stand behind her, one holding a baby and another who stands in front of her holding a plate with a bowl on it.

This scene, in Griselda's bedchamber, is separated by the architectural frame of the room from the second part of this scene in which Gualtieri and three of his men are shown playing chess.

Scene XVI The West Wall: Lower Register, Right.
This two part scene first shows Griselda handing her son over to Gualtieri's servant. The left episode takes place indoors while the right scene is placed outdoors. It is similar in composition to the earlier scene of her giving away her daughter in its inclusion of two episodes. It differs though in its inclusion of a woman in the second episode who is part of the company on horseback.

Scene XVII The North Wall: Lower Register, Left.

In this indoor scene, Gualtieri and Griselda are seated in the centre foreground. Gualtieri sits on a chair while Griselda sits on a pile of cushions. Behind Griselda are three women, while standing behind Gualtieri are his noble men, one of whom is carrying a bird. Gualtieri is reading a letter.

Scene XVIII The North Wall: Lower Register, Middle.

This scene takes place in two parts. In the left episode, Gualtieri and his noble men stand in the doorway and face Griselda, who stands outside in only her shift. A woman to the right of Gualtieri holds Griselda's robes in her arms. Gualtieri, who is holding his staff, gestures toward Griselda to leave and Griselda holds up both her hands as if in agreement.

The right side of the scene shows Griselda, dressed only in her shift, meeting her father Giannucolo outside his house. He holds her old dress over one arm and takes her wrist in his hand.

Scene XIX The North Wall: Lower Register, Right.

This scene is shown in two parts, the first episode shows Griselda sitting on the ground in front of Giannucolo's house sewing cloth. She looks down at her work as her father listens to two of Gualtieri's servants. In the background behind a wattle fence, is a landscape with a shepherd tending his sheep.
In the second part of the scene, Griselda and the two servants stand at the doorway to the palace in front of Gualtieri, who has his staff in his hand.

Scene XX The East Wall: Lower Register, Left.

In this scene Griselda stands in the doorway of the palace and meets the company of the Duke of Panago with the prospective bride and her brother. She is wearing plain garments and is barefoot.

Scene XXI The East Wall: Lower Register, Middle.
This is the banquet scene in which Griselda and Gualtieri are seated at a table with their two children and two other men, the Duke of Panago and his companion.

Gualtieri obviously gestures towards the children as he turns to speak to Griselda. In the background men are playing musical instruments and serving food.

Scene XXII The East Wall: Lower Register, Right.

This scene takes place in two parts. On the left side Griselda is shown seated, being dressed in her elegant robes by two noble woman. In the next scene on the right side, she is seen standing beside Gualtieri as her children bend to greet her. The men of the court stand behind watching.

Scene XXIII The South Wall: Lower Register, Left.

This scene depicts the marriage of Griselda's daughter. Gualtieri and Griselda are seated on the left side and behind them musicians play trumpets. In the center of the scene a couple stands holding hands.

Scene XXIV The South Wall: Lower Register, Left Side of the Window.

The last scene is unusual both in its location in the room and in its choice of subject matter. It is placed to the left of the window in the south wall. It seems to show the departure of the Duke of Panago as he leaves to return to Bologna. It places the whole family together as they stand in a row saying good-bye to the Duke.

Although the individual scenes are separated by the dividing borders, they function as a continuous narrative. This coherence comes not from the use of a consistent overall perspective but from other features which establish the cycle as a monumental narrative. As a whole the scenes have strong similarities. While there are both indoor and outdoor scenes, they generally contain consistent architectural features, and the figures are painted in a restricted palette.

One aspect of their consistency comes from the similarity in overall color. The frescoes are painted in *grisaille*, or more precisely *chiaroscuro a terretta*. Background details such as the patterns of the ceiling, walls and floor have been done in reddish brown and dark green tones. The figures, which are generally about the same size in every scene are all drawn using a dark outline filled in with rather flat color. The use of shadow is generally without much gradation.

The figures have generic features. They are not highly individualized and characterization is confined to relatively subtle differences in clothing, and to some specificity in the facial features of the main characters. The figure of Gualtieri is always shown with a distinctive hat to distinguish him from the other members of his company. The figure of Griselda is also individualized both by her facial features and her costume. The third individualized figure is that of Griselda's father,

Giannucolo, who is always shown with a round flat brimmed hat and a ragged tunic edge. While these three figures have particular characteristics, the remainder of the figures are quite generic. In most scenes, Gualtieri and Griselda are accompanied by his courtiers and her ladies in waiting, giving the impression of many people crowding the scenes.

Like the figures, most of the elements of the settings are generic and repeated throughout the cycle. In some scenes, specific settings and architectural details are repeated, and so can be identified as the house of Griselda, or the interior of Gualtieri's castle. In most interior scenes, there is a minimum of furniture. The square patterns on the ceiling, the walls, and the tiled floor are all consistent features.

While these elements of each scene are similar, the scenes do not conform to an overall perspective system. Although each scene uses linear elements to give a sense of perspective, these elements are not regulated by a coherent mathematical system and the perspectival elements in the scenes on any one wall do not use a single vanishing point. Regardless of their division into distinct spatial units, the scenes function effectively together because of the other features of the setting, figures and color.

Although the scenes contribute to the general narrative, they also contain many elements which reflect domestic life and leisurely pursuits. In one scene, for example, the dishes are being prepared for the wedding banquet. A stack of bowls wrapped in a cloth are carried to the table by one servant, while another servant waits for food to be cut before serving the dish. In another scene, there is a shepherd and his flock in the background. More evident are references to Gualtieri's leisure activities. In two scenes, a courtier is shown holding a hunting bird, and there are several hunting dogs in one of these scenes also. In two other scenes, Gualtieri and his courtiers are depicted playing cards and backgammon.

The artist of the frescoes is not known, although there have been several suggestions. The frescoes have been variously attributed to such artists as the Cremonese, Antonio Cicognara, or an unknown Emilian artist. They have also been attributed to Pisanello, Michelino da Besozzo, or the Milanese painter and designer of stained glass windows, Nicolò da Varallo. The work of all these artists has been documented both chronologically, within the time period in which the frescoes at Roccabianca were painted, and geographically, within the area of Northern Italy.

This evidence is the major basis for many of the attributions of the frescoes by such authors as Ferrari and Lorenzi, who point out the difficulties in localizing the style of the frescoes within the major stylistic movements of Northern Italy. They argue that this general identification is more important than the attribution to a single artist.[37]

Contrary to the conclusion of these authors, Ragghianti proposed the attribution of the frescoes to a single artist. The hypothesis he developed, that the frescoes are the work of Nicolò da Varallo is based on both stylistic evidence and evidence that this artist had worked on similar projects in and around Parma. Nicolò da Varallo is known primarily for his work on the stain glass windows for Milan Cathedral but Ragghianti further notes the presence of religious frescoes attributed to him in centers around Milan such as Monza and Cremona. The similarities in the formal qualities of all these works and the evidence that he was active in Lombardy during the later half of the 15th century provide persuasive, although not conclusive, evidence that the frescoes of the Camera di Griselda may have been painted by Nicolò da Varallo.[38]

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37 M.L. Ferrari, Giovan Pietro da Cemmo, (Milano, 1956) ; Lorenzi, "La Storia di Griselda," 533-549.
38 Carlo Ragghianti, "Pittura lombarda del Quattrocento," 31-36.

Chapter 3

Potential Sources for the Frescoes of the Camera di Griselda

Frescoes cover not only the walls but also the ceiling of the Camera di Griselda (See Fig.6). While the walls are devoted to depictions of the story of Griselda, an earthly subject matter, the ceiling is painted with astrological images which represent the heavens.

The combination of figures on the ceiling have been taken to represent either the horoscope of Pier Maria Rossi, or the stellar constellation at the time of a particular event in the lives of Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini. They have also been read either as a stellar map, or a purely imaginary depiction of the constellations and planets. As Lippincott has noted, it has often been observed that the ceiling bears a strong resemblance to planispheric stellar maps, but the position of the sun relative to the northern and southern constellations make this identification unlikely.[39] Further complicating the interpretation of the ceiling frescoes is the fact that the majority of the figures, while resembling constellar imagery, do not follow the more common iconography of astrological figures. Although each is named in the label located beside it, some of the names do not relate to known astrological imagery, a point which has been used to suggest their imaginary character. However, Lippincott asserts that these constellations "when placed in their proper context, are certainly as faithful to their pictorial sources as the Griselda cycle which they accompany."[40]

According to Lippincott's research, that context is the group of astrological manuscripts, which are written in Latin and based on the *Almagest* of Ptolemy, and which contain lists of variant names for the constellations from Arabic, Greek and Latin sources. She has shown that the labels on the ceiling are drawn from these lists. In her analysis of each of the figures of the constellations she has been able to

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39 Lippincott, "The Astrological Vault," 43-70.
40 Ibid., 45.

relate them to manuscripts completed in Northern Italy during this period. "It seems clear," she notes, "that they reflect a Tabular pictorial tradition current in this region during the mid-fifteenth century." [41]

Besides the known constellations and zodiacal figures, there are a number of *imprese* or personal emblems which may relate the ceiling to the patron, Pier Maria Rossi, to his mistress Bianca Pelligrini, and to political allegiances among the local ruling families. These links are subtle and often provide visual puns which would have to be deciphered by a knowledgeable viewer.

There is the cloud-like image, which has been associated with the flaming *torse* on the medals by Enzola bearing Bianca Pelligrini's image, and which also bears some resemblance to the flaming turtle-dove device used by the Visconti. The image itself is unclear but it seems to be a layered cloud with bolts of lightening, light or fire emanating from each end. Its use here, Lippincott suggests, may relate both to Bianca Pelligrini, and also represent the Rossi and Pelligrini families' relationship to the Visconti/Sforza dynasty.

There is also a second lion in the sign of Leo, which may refer to the Rossi *impresa* of the lion rampant seen on Rossi's armor on his medals. Beside the lion is a small sun which may refer both to the sun's predominance in this constellation and to the coincidence of the Rossi Lion and the Pelligrini Sun. The latter reference is to the rays of sunshine which appear behind Bianca Pelligrini on the medals referred to earlier.

The use of a marchional crown, instead of a shield or jeweled ring, for the astrological feature, *corona meridionalis*, is also unusual. It may also refer to the *impresa* of three marchional crowns surrounding two entwined hearts which is used on the tiles in the Camera d'Oro in Torrechiara, and carved on the *tribunetta* from the private chapel used by Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini.

Although Lippincott believes that this is sufficient evidence to suggest that the Griselda cycle refers to Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini, she does not find support for Campari's suggestion that the ceiling may depict a particular horoscope of an eventful time in the lives of Rossi and Pelligrini, nor for Ragghianti's hypothesis

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41 Ibid., 50.

that it might depict Rossi's birth horoscope.[42] However, she points out that the placement over the Lion in Leo of a small star with a heart engraved on it and a marchional crown above it may refer to Rossi's birth date as given by Caviceo, his court humanist. She also suggests, by extension, that the placement of a similar *impresa* of an uncrowned star with an engraved heart, but without the crown, near to the constellation Sagittarius may identify Bianca Pelligrini's birth date.

Lippincott has shown that the ceiling frescoes do not follow the standard form of a stellar map, nor do they illustrate a particular horoscope. Instead they seem to include depictions of the northern and southern constellations as well as a series of zodiacal and planetary illustrations based on representations from contemporary astrological manuscripts. The addition of the *imprese* suggest that the room may have been commissioned to celebrate the relationship of Bianca Pelligrini and Pier Maria Rossi. They also provide a possible allusion for the fresco cycle on the walls.

Further evidence for the relationship between the subject matter of the heavenly ceiling and the earthly walls can be found in the epilogue to Boccaccio's Griselda narrative.[43] Having related the story, Dioneo, the narrator of the Griselda story, then asks his audience:

> What more can be said here, except that godlike spirits do sometimes rain down from heaven into the poor homes, just as do those more suited to ruling over men make their appearances in royal palaces.[44]

This question emphasizes the importance of virtue as a heavenly gift, and its precedence over the social position and earthly powers of the nobility. The position of the transcendent star at the moment of birth marked the place in the heavens from which the gifts of the soul descended to the newborn child. The inclusion of the *imprese* as references to the positions on the ceiling of the natal stars of Pier Maria

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42 F.L. Campari, Un Castello del Parmigiano attraverso i secoli, (Parma, 1910).; Carlo Ragghianti, "Pittura lombarda del Quattrocento," 34-39.

43 Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca", 24.

44 Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron. ed. Mark Musa, and Peter Bondanella (New York: Random House, 1977), 142.

Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini could be taken to also refer to the gifts of divine virtues which were bestowed on them at their births.

This would provide an explanation of the relationship between the ceiling decorations and those of the walls below. It is also a reason for the choice of the Griselda story as the subject matter for the decoration of those walls. Just as the relationship of Gualtieri and Griselda is redeemed through the virtuous Griselda; so also the relationship of Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini may be redeemed through the virtues accorded her. This allusion provides a possible argument for the legitimization of a relationship based on divine virtue, that falls outside the legal contract of a noble marriage, which was founded on practical matters of social politics and land acquisition.

Although the quotation from Boccaccio provides some evidence for the coherence of the subject matter between ceiling and walls, and for the choice of the Griselda story, the identification of Boccaccio as the single literary source used by the artist in the depiction of the Griselda cycle is less certain. The particular story, while first appearing in written form in Boccaccio's Decameron was subsequently retold by Petrarca and other writers. It was also available in various versions in the oral and visual traditions of the time.

Since illustrated astrological manuscripts provided a crucial reference for the frescoes on the ceiling, it is important to consider what contemporary visual sources might have influenced the production of the frescoes on the walls of the Camera di Griselda.

While there is documentation indicating that there were secular frescoes in many of the castles of the major ruling families of northern Italy, only one other known fresco cycle illustrated the story of Griselda.[45] Located in the Visconti castle in Pavia, it was subsequently removed or destroyed in the renovations to the castle in 1467, on the occasion of the marriage of Francesco Sforza and Bona da Savoy. Goffredo della Chiesa in his Cronaca, written in 1430, noted that one of the rooms contained the history of Griselda painted "ab antiquo". This is the only record of the presence of the fresco cycle. Caffi, in a description of the castle written in 1876

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45 Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca," 19.

noted the presence of a ceiling which contained depictions of the planets. Simicik suggested that Pier Maria Rossi may have visited Pavia, saw both the frescoes of Griselda and the ceiling with the planets, and when he decided to decorate Roccabianca, chose to emulate the frescoes to illustrate his equality with the ruling noble family, the Sforza.[46] We are severely limited in comparing the frescoes however since there is nothing beyond della Chiesa's reference. We are not even certain whether the complete narrative or only selected scenes were depicted in the Pavia frescoes.

The other visual sources for the Griselda frescoes are painted wedding chests or *cassoni*. Although the Griselda story was not the most popular subject matter for *cassone* painting, there are eight panels from *cassoni* which make reference to the Griselda story.[47] One panel has been attributed to Pesellino, another to Apollonio di Giovanni, three to the Maestro di Cassoni, and three others to the Maestro della Storia di Griselda. Two of the three panels of the Maestro di Cassoni are from a single *cassone* and all of the panels of the Maestro della Storia di Griselda form part of a single *cassone*. The panels can be dated to the 15th century, but only the Pesellino *cassone* panel can be definitively dated to 1440. All the *cassone* tend to emphasize the wedding sequence rather than the subsequent trials of Griselda. Baskins compares two *cassone* panels, those of Pesellino, and Apollonio di Giovanni. Both panels, beginning on the left, illustrate first the meeting of Gualtieri and his advisors, then the procession to find Griselda, next the meeting with Griselda near the well, and finally, at the right hand edge of the panel, the wedding ceremony, where the disrobed Griselda accepts the hand of Gualtieri. In her analysis, Baskins points out that the majority of the panel is taken up with a focus on Gualtieri as the central figure, that the depiction of the procession resembles those illustrations of the hunt for noble game, and that, by choosing to depict Griselda as a "bare bride," they give emphasis to, and yet contest the authority of Gualtieri.[48] She suggests that this contestation is partly due to the fact that in the depiction there is no action representing Gualtieri asking for Griselda "to be stripped," so that showing Griselda

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46 Ibid.

47 Baskins, "Griselda, or the Renaissance Bride, "153-175.; Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca," 16.

48 Baskins, "Griselda, or the Renaissance Bride," 160.

as a nude figure places her beyond the peasant girl of Gualtieri's choice. According to Baskins, she assumes qualities which link her to the iconography of mythological figures.

Furthermore, the depiction does not include the rerobing in the new clothing provided by Gualtieri prior to their wedding, so that Griselda avoids the reflection of belonging already to the house of Gualtieri. Baskins, also points out that the placement of the wedding ceremony with the bare bride in the right hand frame of the panel gives it more prominence than the textual reference to Boccaccio would suggest, and that it reflects neither the popular iconography used in wedding illustrations nor the social customs of the times.[49]

Of the work of the Maestro di Cassoni, two *cassone* panels are located together in the Museo Civico in Venice, and one is located in the Serristori collection in Florence. The two panels in Venice are thought to be from the same *cassone*. The first panel, where the movement is from left to right, depicts the journey of Griselda and Gualtieri to their new home. They are first shown wearing elaborate costumes and processing to the water's edge, then embarking on a boat and arriving at the castle. The second panel, which flows from right to left, begins with the procession of the Marchese and his followers to a banquet scene where the wedding is being celebrated. The elaborate nature of the clothing is thought by Klapisch-Zuber to reflect the use of the *cassone* as a container for the trousseau of the new bride when she is being conveyed to her husband's house.[50] The decorative elaboration of the *cassone* was meant to suggest the richness of the clothing within. Klapisch-Zuber also suggests that the general emphasis on the wedding sequence and on the clothing as decorative motifs, was a reflection of the use of the *cassone* as part of the wedding ritual. Also obvious in these panels, are fantastical details such as the use of the boat to convey Gualtieri and Griselda to the castle, events which are not present in the literary versions of the story.

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49 Ibid., 174.

50 Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

The third panel attributed to the Maestro di Cassoni is in the Serristori collection in Florence. Simicik provides two descriptions.[51] First she briefly describes it as including, from left to right, Gualtieri returning from a hunt, the birth of their first child, Gualtieri and Griselda talking together, and the final banquet. Later she provides a more detailed description of Griselda arriving on horseback at the castle of Gualtieri, Griselda giving up her second child, and finally Griselda being told by Gualtieri to return to her father's house. This *cassone* would seem to be the only one of the five which includes any reference to the trials of Griselda. It seems to follow the general outline of the story more completely that the other *cassoni*.

The final three *cassone* panels are located in the National Gallery in London, England. They are attributed to the Maestro della Storia di Griselda and are thought to be parts of a single *cassone*. Based on the other work attributed to this Sienese artist, these works are thought to have been completed at the end of the 15th century. They are also very different in style from the other *cassoni*, and may reflect a style of *cassone* which would not have been available to the artist of the Roccabianca frescoes.

Given that the illustrations on the *cassoni* tended to emphasize the wedding sequence, and to place more emphasis on details portraying the richness of the setting and the clothing, as well as on the social status of the bridegroom, they show few similarities to the Roccabianca frescoes. A comparison of the styles of the works, and of the themes chosen for depiction reveals few congruencies between the frescoes and the *cassoni*. The *cassoni*, as Baskins noted, have a multiplicity of details which encourage the eye to linger over the scenes and look backwards as well as forwards, the frescoes tend to be much more direct and simple in their illustrations.

Although it was useful to compare the visual story in the frescoes with these earlier illustrations, it is also important to compare the narrative cycle with available literary sources, since they may prove to have been influential in the decisions both about what to depict in individual scenes and about what themes to illustrate in the fresco cycle. Boccaccio's and Petrarca's versions are of particular importance because they not only provide the first written accounts of the Griselda story, but

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51 Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca," 16-19.

also reflect the competing philosophical perspectives of their particular authors, which subsequently became part of a larger poetic debate.

The work of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) provided an important foundation for the philosophical development of both writers, although each chose to interpret Dante's ideas differently. Dante saw the vernacular as a new language through which to present literature. In De vulgari Eloquentia (1304-1305) he outlined his argument in the following manner:

> ...of these two [types of language] the nobler is the vernacular; both because it was the first to be used by human beings and because it is spoken everywhere, and because it is natural to us whereas the other by contrast, is artificial.[52]

For Dante, the vernacular is closest in nature to an individual, since it is the first language formed in the mind. He saw any other secondary language, such as Latin, as artificial since it required time and study to learn. Based on this deduction Dante revolutionized the history of Italian literature by writing his monumental text the Divine Comedy in the Florentine dialect as an example of the promise of the vernacular.

Late in his life, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) wrote a biography of Dante entitled Trattatello in laude di Dante. In it, he praised Dante as a poetic and philosophical model, as a contemplative individual, as a citizen indignant at the decline in the political life in Florence, and principally as the founder of the Italian language as a medium for literature. Many of these beliefs were ones that Boccaccio also accepted.[53] Although he studied the works of antiquity, Giovanni Boccaccio following Dante's principles about the importance of the Italian language, wrote many of his early works in the vernacular, and adopted themes and structures from Dante's poetry.

Written in the vernacular, the Decameron, which is dated between 1348 and 1351, is his most prominent work under the influence of Dante. Just as Dante used numerical schemes in his work, Boccaccio structured this work around the number ten. The Decameron describes ten days of story-telling by ten young people who

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52 Kenelm Foster, Petrarch: Poet and Humanist, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 24.

retreat to a villa in the Florentine hills to escape the plague. A plague had actually struck Florence in 1348, and the names of some of the characters in the stories were those of people alive at the time. Scholars subsequently emphasized the historical accuracy of the tales and sought to document the characters as real and the situations as true while later scholars sought to emphasize the original source of each of the stories.[54] While both these elements are present in the Decameron, they do not provide the underlying structure of the work.

Like Dante, Boccaccio was concerned with the problems of contemporary life, but, unlike Dante, whose Divine Comedy takes place as a journey from Hell to Paradise, Boccaccio used the setting of a villa near Florence which brought a particular relevance and immediacy to his stories. Like Dante, he referred to people who were known to his initial readers, in order to bring a sense of historical veracity to his work. Besides these allusions, Boccaccio also illustrated the issues around Italian mercantilism, its optimism and practicality as well as its duplicity and deceit.[55]

However, Boccaccio, following Dante, placed all of the narrative devices used in the *novella* within a moral framework which linked together the virtues and vices exemplified in the stories. The *novella* develop generally from the rejection of the vices displayed in the earliest stories through the transformation of characters in the later narratives to the final story of Griselda with its emphasis on magnanimity and virtue. Kirkham suggests that this framework is based on Aristotelian ethics which were beginning to permeate all aspects of cultural life in the Florence of that time.[56]

The underlying structure is complex: it combines the Aristotelian philosophy of the primacy of reason leading to virtue, and an exposition of the competing roles of Nature and Fortune in the "art of living," within a narrative structure which makes numerous allusions to Dante, and to Ancient Greek and Roman poets such as

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53 Judith Powers Serafini-Sauli, Giovanni Boccaccio, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

54 Vittore Branca, "Origini e fortuna europea della Griselda," Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron XXX(1976): 393.

55 Victoria Kirkham, The Sign and Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction, (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1993) 184.

Ovid.[57] The narrative also constitutes a running commentary on contemporary life, complete with historical allusions. Together, these frames provide for multiple interpretations so that the stories can be read on many levels.

Petrarca (1304-1374) was a contemporary of Boccaccio, and the two writers knew each other well. In the spring of 1351, when Boccaccio was completing the Decameron, he met Francesco Petrarca, who was to become a major influence on his work. In 1341 Boccaccio had even written a life of Petrarca, De vita et moribus domini Francisci Petracchi, on the occasion of Petrarca's being crowned Poet Laureate in Rome. Although they met on only four occasions, they continued their relationship by writing to each other throughout their lifetimes. As part of their scholarly activities, both writers were involved in translating various works, and they often wrote to each other seeking advice and arguing interpretations. Hence, it is not surprising that Petrarca chose to translate the last story of the Decameron, the Griselda tale, into Latin.

Although it is probable that they discussed the work at their meeting in Padua,[58] it was twenty years later, in 1373, when Petrarca wrote to Boccaccio. In his letter he explained that, having obtained a copy of the Decameron, he was struck with the last story, explaining:

> At the close you have placed a story which differs entirely from most that precede it, and which so delighted and fascinated me that, in spite of cares which made me almost oblivious of myself, I was seized with the desire to learn it by heart.[59]

Petrarca's translation appropriately, like the Griselda story in the Decameron appears in the last letter of Petrarca's work, Seniles, a series of one hundred and twenty five letters written between 1361 and 1374. The title De obedientia ac fide uxoria mythologia, further emphasizes the universality and applicability of the story.

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56 Ibid., 185

57 Powers Serafini-Sauli Serafini-Sauli, Giovanni Boccaccio, 73

58 Branca, "Origini e fortuna," 393.

59 Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, ed. Mark Musa, and Peter Bondanella (New York: Random House, 1977), 142.

In a comparison between Boccaccio's original prose version, written in vernacular Italian for a secular audience, and Petrarca's subsequent Latin adaptation, three important differences arise. First, is the question of the vernacular, and specifically the use of Latin rather than Italian as a medium for literature. Then, there is the inclusion of Petrarca's humanist framework as a grounding for the story, and finally, there is the reading of the story as separate from its place in the context of the Decameron.

After having received a copy of Dante's Divine Comedy from Boccaccio, Petrarca wrote to him explaining his attitude towards Dante, and his beliefs about the uses of the vernacular. He notes that he has been accused by some of jealousy in regard to the greatness achieved by Dante. Petrarca attempts to rebuff the arguments of his accusers by commenting that he cannot be capable of jealousy of one [i.e., Dante] who devoted his whole life to those things which were "but the flowers and first fruits of my youth."[60] He compares Dante's lifelong devotion to the vernacular with his own early work like the Canzoniere which was also written in the vernacular.

For Petrarca, who later termed his early works "trifles," the use of Latin signified a stylistic maturity as well as an elevation of subject matter and content. Although Petrarca wrote and spoke both Latin and Italian, he never considered them to be separate languages. He conceived of the two languages as intrinsically mixed.[61] Unlike Dante, he did not see the unity of the vernacular as a force in itself; rather he thought of the two languages as part of the same whole, but useful to two different social classes for two different purposes. As a humanist devoted to the reconstruction and glorification of the antique world, Petrarca believed that Latin, which was handed down from the classical writers, was the language of scholars used for the edification of the elite.

In writing to Boccaccio about the Decameron, Petrarca explains that he has been unable to read the text thoroughly because he has been taken with more important things involving "the critical condition of the state" than this book

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60 James Harvey Robinson, Petrarch, The First Modern Scholar, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 187.

61 Foster, Petrarch, 28-29.

"written in our mother tongue" and "for the multitude."[62] He disapproves of the means employed by Boccaccio and notes that the freedom of the humor is at times too explicit, but that this can be excused, he believes, in light of the style, language and intended audience. In contrast, Petrarca believed that it was necessary to imitate the ancients and produce works for the upper classes in a language and style which was common only to them. It is with these ideas in mind that Petrarca declares his intention to translate the last story of the Decameron.

Over the course of his life, Petrarca developed a humanist outlook which emphasized the importance of classical knowledge, the quality of language, the aesthetics of words and linguistic structures, and the importance of moral virtues.[63] While, for most of his life, he stressed these virtues as the example of human achievement derived from ancient times, towards the end of his life, Petrarca focused on bringing the learning of the classical past to bear on contemporary and political issues within a distinctly Christian orientation. After 1350, and probably influenced by his discovery of Cicero's letters to Atticus and others, Petrarca chose the form of the personal letter to convey his thoughts and critiques of contemporary life.

One aspect of Petrarca's philosophical orientation was his explication of the ideal of virtue, human moral perfection based not on specific virtues but rather on the soul's relationship with God. For Petrarca, the struggle for virtue, for the good life, was a struggle between the soul and the body. The soul ennobled by God was imprisoned within the human body and had to war against the passions of the body in seeking the good life.[64] Since Petrarca translated the Griselda story in the year before his death, this orientation is present in his version.

In his letter to Boccaccio, Petrarca initially suggested that he had made only slight grammatical changes where he felt it necessary. However, he did admit to changing the focus of the story, commenting:

> Now it will be apparent that I have retold this story in another style not so much to incite the women of our time to imitate the patience of

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62 Robinson, Petrarch, 187.

63 Foster, Petrarch, 157

64 Giuseppe Mazzotta, The Worlds of Petrarch, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 80-101.

> that wife—which seems to me hardly imitatable—as to encourage those who read it to imitate at least the constancy of the woman, so that what she did for her husband they might have the courage to do for our God.[65]

When the narratives are compared, it is evident that this was not a mere translation attempting to be faithful to the original, but rather was a reworking, which changed the focus of the story, and infused it with his own emphasis on virtue and his beliefs about the function of language.

Besides changing the focus of the Griselda story, Petrarca's version also removed the story from its place in the cosmology of the Decameron. Indeed, it was as an individual story that the Griselda tale was diffused, and while the versions of the Griselda tale by Boccaccio and Petrarca were well-known throughout the Quattrocento in Italy, it was Petrarca's Latin version that became popular throughout the rest of Europe.[66] It became the source for later versions in French, English and German. Many of the later writers did not know that there was an original source in Boccaccio's Decameron.

Without the complete context of the Decameron, the story of Griselda takes on a restricted meaning. The juxtaposition of the narrator of the last and first stories, the comparisons of the virtues and vices illustrated in these two bookend stories, and the meanings which can be drawn about the place of Virtues, Nature and Fortune in life are all lost to the reader of the single tale. Furthermore, when only the single story is used, the voice of the narrator, Dioneo, and his commentary in relation both to the story and the context is lost. Petrarca, replaces the narrator's voice with his own. Hence, the voice of Boccaccio, partly visible in the commentary of Dioneo is silenced. This, then, is no mere translation, but an obvious effort by Petrarca to use Boccaccio's story form to develop his own allegory on the virtue of patience.

Although the stories are related, the differences between the two narratives are clear when the stories are compared. Boccaccio's story revolves around the decisions of Gualtieri who was pressed by his subjects to marry so that they might

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65 Emilie Kadish, "Petrarch's Griselda: An English Translation," Medievalia 2 (1976): 22.

not be left without a ruler. Despite believing that it was impossible to find a wife whose ideas matched his own, he agreed to their request commenting, "tie me up with these chains" and he chose a poor but "pleasant" girl for his wife. Subsequently shown to be consistently "pleasing, attractive and well-mannered. . [and] obedient to her husband's wishes," Gualtieri put his wife's patience to a series of tests.[67] Seeing her endurance throughout these three ordeals, Gualtieri relieved her of her suffering, restored her to her former position and "lived a long and happy life with Griselda, always honoring her as much as he could."[68]

In Petrarca's story, the focus is on Griselda. Valterius (Gualtieri) is similarly approached by his subjects "to bend his neck . . . to the lawful yoke" and despite enjoying "total freedom--which is rare in marriage" he agrees to do as they desire. He continues,

> Whatever good there is in man comes only from God. To him I shall entrust both the rank and the outcome of my marriage, placing my hope in his wonted kindness; he himself will find for me that which may be advantageous to my peace of mind and my well-being.[69]

Petrarca goes on to describe how "divine grace sometimes descends into the hovels of the poor" claiming that Griselda was remarkable not only for her beauty but also for her moral and spiritual virtues.[70] According to Petrarca, "She fulfilled to perfection all the obligations of filial obedience and piety."[71] Valterius had observed Griselda not with lust at her beauty but with a recognition of her moral excellence so he chose her as his bride. The people were charmed by her virtue, and Griselda is described as dealing effectively with concerns of state in the absence of her lord. When she was tested by Valterius, Griselda affirmed her love for him and continued to show him devotion and conjugal fidelity. When he eventually revealed the truth,

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66 Raffaele Morabito, La storia di Griselda in Europa, (Roma: Japadre Editore L'Aquila, 1990).

67 Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, ed. Mark Musa, and Peter Bondanella (New York: Random House, 1977), 136.

68 Ibid, p.142.

69 Emilie Kadish, "Petrarch's Griselda: An English Translation," Medievalia 2 (1976): 10.

70 Ibid., p.11.

71 Ibid., p.11.

he explained that he was "curious and given to experimentation, not wicked." Petrarca concludes, "In his marriage and his offspring he was a fortunate man."[72]

In his telling of the story, Petrarca places greater emphasis on the figure of Griselda than does Boccaccio. She is the central character, and Petrarca constructs his tale around her. The actions of Valterius are secondary to Griselda's reactions and Valterius functions only as the medium through which Griselda's true virtues can be realized. In Petrarca's story, the character of Valterius is further developed and more humane. He speaks to Griselda to warn her of his intentions to have his children removed and advises her to be strong and hold to her marital agreement. Valterius also shows his sensitivity and emotion when he has to hold back his tears upon hearing of Griselda's reaction to the abduction of their daughter.

In Boccaccio's story, the motivations for Gualtieri's cruelties are supported only by the circumstance that the marquis was struck by the desire to test his wife. He is described as overcome by this wish to the extent that the members of his court had to intervene on behalf of Griselda. Even the ladies of the court recognized his harshness towards Griselda and moved to comfort her.

Petrarca's Valterius is motivated by a greater force than his own desire. He is fulfilling his role as a ruler to maintain the political and social order of the court. Although he too is overcome with a desire to test his wife's fidelity to his wishes, Valterius uses as the excuse for his actions his belief that his subjects don't want a peasant as a ruler. In Petrarca's efforts to give his version greater pathos and humanity, he has Valterius reveal his plans for his family early on in the story and Valterius alludes to his true intentions for Griselda on several occasions. In contrast, as the events of the Boccaccio story play out, the viewer is only aware of Gualtieri's intentions near the close of the story. Although the reader is told that the daughter was reared and educated with a kinswoman, the identity of Gualtieri's bride is not revealed until the last minute.

Like the figure of Valterius, Petrarca's Griselda is also portrayed as more human and emotional. Griselda is shown as the perfect mother who is disturbed by the abduction of her children and is overwhelmed when they are returned to her.

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72 Ibid., p.22.

Unlike Boccaccio who describes Griselda as being dressed in her court attire before she is fully reunited with her children, Petrarca places emphasis on the emotional and tearful reunion.

Petrarca also makes much of Griselda's constancy to the wishes of Valterius and has her say,

> Whatever you want, therefore, I also want. And indeed, if I were aware of your future will, even before I knew what it was I would begin to want and to desire what you wanted. As it is, I gladly obey your will which I cannot anticipate. Suppose that I understand your pleasure is that I die; I shall willingly die. In a word, nothing, not death itself, will have been equal to our love.[73]

To the same situation, Boccaccio's Griselda answers, "My lord, think only of making yourself happy and of satisfying your desires and do not worry about me at all, for nothing pleases me more than to see you contented."[74] While Petrarca's Griselda bases her response on her love of her lord, Boccaccio's Griselda stresses her inferior social position and the requirement of a wife.

Boccaccio writes frankly and simply without an elaboration of detail. The story is told by the outspoken character of Dioneo who prefaces his narrative by saying, "I am minded to tell you somewhat of a Marquis; certainty, not magnificent, but a piece of madness, although there came good to him in the end.[75] In saying this, the speaker frames how readers will interpret the story. The *novella* moves rapidly to its conclusion. Boccaccio keeps the moral of the story for the epilogue. Here Dioneo points out how heaven can place virtue among the poor, just as those who are born into nobility may lack virtue. However, without the intemperance of Gualtieri, Griselda's virtue might never have been disclosed, nor Gualtieri have recognized the goodness of his wife.

The entire story is told by Petrarca with an elevated tone. In response to brief questions from Valterius, Griselda is given long, erudite dialogues which place

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73 Ibid., p.16.

74 Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, ed. Mark Musa, and Peter Bondanella (New York: Random House, 1977), 138.

75 Ibid., 142.

her in a teaching role where she refers most often to her love for Valterius and her reverence for God. Valterius, in turn, stresses that good comes only from God but that as an earthly ruler he is obligated to ensure the preservation of his subjects and kingdom and test the constancy of his wife. In his epilogue, Petrarca elucidates the importance of the story as an allegory for faithfulness to God. He notes that God allows people to be tested so that they might know their weaknesses and concludes, "Gladly would I reckon among constant men whoever suffers without complaint for the sake of his God what for her mortal spouse that lowly little woman endured."[76]

While Petrarca places his focus on the trials of Griselda and makes her the major figure in his story, Boccaccio emphasizes the role of Gualtieri and the happy resolution of his intemperate decisions. Gualtieri is a foolish man who is brought to his senses through his wife's patience; through her fortitude in the face of his trials, he is led to recognize her constancy and, ennobled and enlightened by her virtue, lives "a long and happy life."[77] While Petrarca stresses the relationship of Griselda's trials with Christian virtue, Boccaccio emphasizes the education of Gualtieri, who in denying a relationship between his own Nature and the actions of another, sought to challenge Fortune and, in doing so, obtained Virtue.

For Boccaccio, Nature and Fortune were important constructs in understanding one of the themes of the Decameron. As Powers Serafini-Sauli has shown neither is a simple concept. Although Nature was "morally neutral" and referred most directly to sexual love, it also embraced the things of the natural world and was linked to them through the theme of fertility and the drive to guarantee the preservation of the species.[78] As a love that ennobled and enlightened, it also formed the basis for the notion of courtly love of an exalted woman. At the same time Nature also included natural reason which had encouraged the Decameron's storytellers to leave plague-ridden Florence, evidence also of self-preservation.

Accompanying Nature was Fortune, whom Powers Serafini-Sauli has described as "a personification of the human condition": a condition where

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76 Emilie Kadish, "Petrarch's Griselda: An English Translation," Medievalia 2 (1976): 22.

77 Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron, ed. Mark Musa, and Peter Bondanella (New York: Random House, 1977), 142.

78 Powers Serafini-Sauli, Giovanni Boccaccio, 69.

individuals, in order to live, had to pit themselves against forces over which they had no control.[79] Humanity, therefore had to work with both Nature and Fortune to be successful. In the two bookend stories of the Decameron, the characters are faced with making decisions about their own destiny in the face of the forces of Fortune. Gualtieri in making his own decision about whom to marry realizes his own destiny, just as the peasant Griselda in choosing to be humble in the face of adversity, ends up as the wife of the Marquis who loves her. In Boccaccio's cosmology, the demands of Fortune, of getting ahead in the world, are intertwined with Natural love. For him, the ability to use natural wit and intelligence to create their own destiny was the mark of virtuous individuals.

Hence, although both stories used a similar narrative sequence, their themes were very different. Both stories were also written over a century before the frescoes at Roccabianca were envisaged, and although texts of both writers were available in the library at the Visconti court, it is impossible to link either version of the Griselda narrative directly to the frescoes.[80]

Although Simicik related seven scenes directly to Petrarca, one scene directly to Boccaccio, and attributed thirteen scenes to either Boccaccio or Petrarca, when the scenes are compared with the narratives of Boccaccio and Petrarca, it can be seen that most of the incidents illustrated in the frescoes take place in both narratives.[81] Although Petrarca provided more immediate details than Boccaccio, he tended to emphasize dialogue rather than description of settings, so that, in many of the scenes, it is impossible to identify a specific narrative source.

For example, in the portions of the texts that relate to the scene of Gualtieri in the company of his courtiers setting out to meet his bride, Petrarca specifies that the company includes women, while Boccaccio does not: since the scene of the departure in the frescoes shows only men, it would seem to follow Boccaccio's text more closely. In the following scene of Griselda's disrobing, however, there are noble women present, making a definitive judgment concerning the textual source impossible. In first scene, when Gualtieri's subjects come to ask him to take a wife,

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79 Ibid., 72.

80 Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca," 16.

81 Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca," 14-15.

one man from the group is portrayed speaking to Gualtieri, and only Petrarca declares that there was a single spokesperson. Yet Boccaccio appears to be the source for the second scene, where Gualtieri is portrayed listening to Giannucolo, an incident of which Petrarca makes no mention. Similarly, only Boccaccio notes the departure of the Duke of Panago, as portrayed in the last scene of the fresco cycle. Finally, the seventh scene, when Griselda is disrobed, most clearly suggests Boccaccio's description. Petrarca describes how the ladies surround Griselda to protect her modesty, while Boccaccio describes how all who were there, looked upon her.

Two scenes in the frescoes are not mentioned in either text; they are scene XI, where Gualtieri and Griselda are shown playing cards, and the second half of scene XV, where Gualtieri is shown playing chess with three companions. Card playing and board games were popular secular subject matter and often appeared in narrative cycles. In the late 13th century the Lombard, Jacopo de Cessolis, wrote a treatise codifying the rules of the game of chess as it was played in Italy and specifically as it was played in Lombardy.[82] His work caused a resurgence of interest in the game of chess, through his use of it as a metaphor for the class system in daily life. Chess games were also used by artists to provide an allusion to the competitive relationship between the players. In some instances the man and his companions are shown laughing at the indecision of the female player while in others the female is making the decisive move. In these examples chess is used as an metaphor for power and control. Chess was considered to be a means to learn military strategy and thus appeared in chivalric tales where the knights were shown playing chess to pass the time.[83] In scene XV, the playing of chess may indicate the way Gualtieri and his courtiers were passing time while Griselda was giving birth, and may also give a general indication of time passing. The playing of chess had become a popular pastime in Italy and was especially popular in Lombardy.

In addition to chess, card games were also a common leisure activity. The game of triumphs or *trionfi*, for example, was adapted from the poem by Petrarca of

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82 Harold James Ruthven Murray, A History of Chess, (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1962), 461.
83 Harry Golombek, Chess: A History, (London: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1976), 64-67.

the same name.[84] The card game initially used the six triumphs described by Petrarca; Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time and Eternity, and subsequently was expanded in several variations to include up to twenty-one triumphs. The game was played by assigning numerical values to the triumphs and drawing for the highest score. The inclusion of card playing in the fresco cycle may be related to the theme of the Griselda tale of creating one's own destiny in the face of Fortune. Both Griselda and Gualtieri are faced with choices which they must overcome to help them realize their own virtue. Like the game of triumphs, in which the player strives to choose the highest cards and in so doing makes the most valuable choices, Gualtieri and Griselda play out their own destiny through the decisions they make.

Both because the frescoes seem to combine information from Boccaccio and Petrarca, and because they introduce new elements, the technique of simply matching the frescoes to the incidents of Petrarca's and Boccaccio's narratives produces both inconclusive and limited results. The frescoes of the Camera di Griselda might more usefully be compared with the versions of the tale by Boccaccio and Petrarca in terms of their general themes and differing philosophical orientations. As we have seen, while Petrarca highlights the patience and constancy of Griselda and provides it as a model for the reader, Boccaccio highlights the good fortune of Gualtieri who, having made a choice which he thought would annoy others, finds in the end that despite his many errors, he loves and is loved by his wife. Boccaccio stresses the misjudgments of Gualtieri and how he is led to realise his good fortune, while Petrarca seems to ignore the moral implications of Gualtieri's actions and stresses instead Griselda's acquiescence with the misfortunes which befall her.

It might be useful, therefore, to examine the frescoes to discover which of the two principal figures is emphasized. In the first six scenes, Gualtieri is the major figure; in scenes VII to XI, the wedding sequence, both figures are in the foreground; in scenes XII to XX, Griselda or Gualtieri figure most prominently in alternating scenes. In the last four scenes, XXI-XXIV, when Gualtieri and Griselda are reconciled and celebrate the wedding of their daughter, both figures have been portrayed with equal emphasis. Based on this analysis, it appears that the figure of Gualtieri is depicted

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84 Gertrude Moakley, The Tarot cards painted by Bonifacio Bembo for the Visconti-Sforza family,

most prominently in the fresco cycle. His figure dominates the first portion of the fresco cycle, and throughout the fresco cycle Griselda is shown as having a role of lesser importance than Gualtieri's and is placed in a secondary position. The placement of greater pictorial emphasis on Gualtieri can be related most clearly to the narrative version of the story presented by Boccaccio. By placing the figure of Gualtieri in the central role in the fresco cycle, the actions of Gualtieri become the focus of the cycle while their impact on Griselda is presented as their inevitable outcome.

The scenes in which Gualtieri and Griselda sit together at the banquet table, eating or playing cards are social scenes which can be interpreted in a number of ways. If we consider the major emphasis to be on the dialogue between the two figures, then these scenes may indicate the influence of Petrarca's text in which greater emphasis is placed on the personal dialogue of the two main figures. However, the scenes may also respond to aspects of Boccaccio's story. In the first social scene, the wedding banquet, Gualtieri and Griselda are shown eating and conversing. This scene may demonstrate that the last act of the wedding sequence took place as a public celebration of the marriage, and that Gualtieri found Griselda to be an appropriate companion. The eleventh scene, with Griselda and Gualtieri playing cards in the company of the court, could show that the choice of Griselda as a wife resulted in a successful integration of her into the social context of the court. This scene also provides the context for the thirteenth scene, where Gualtieri is shown struck with the desire to test Griselda. The figure of Gualtieri is often given the illusion of speaking; he is depicted with his hands gesturing towards Griselda and the other members of his court. To Gualtieri's gestures, Griselda responds with her head bowed, her eyes lowered and her hands held up in agreement or placed in her lap. She never meets his gaze upon her, instead she bows her head or looks away. The depiction of the silent and complacent response of Griselda to the tests of Gualtieri follows more closely the text of Boccaccio. In Boccaccio's text, the figure of Griselda is not developed through her own voice, while in Petrarca's narrative, the

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(New York: The New York Public Library, 1966), 45-50.

dialogue that takes place between Gualtieri and Griselda is essential in characterizing their relationship.

Because Petrarca elevates the constancy of Griselda, his text includes few references to the specifics of daily life. In contrast, Boccaccio places the story within the dilemmas faces by those who want actively to participate in earthly life while seeking eternal rewards. While the frescoes include many illustrations of the domestic activities of the household, the depictions are parsimonious so that the eye is not distracted from the central focus. The focus of the frescoes is clearly on the direct actions of the figures involved. Based on this thematic analysis, the frescoes seem to follow the general pattern of Boccaccio's narrative more closely.

Before leaving the problem of textual sources, it is important to note that, in addition to the versions of the Griselda tale told by Boccaccio and Petrarca, other later adaptations or versions of the story existed contemporaneously with the painting of the Griselda cycle. It is therefore essential to consider the possible influence of these texts on the production of the frescoes. Although these other versions of the Griselda tale may not have been as widely known as the versions by Boccaccio and Petrarca, they may have had a popular place in the local culture of the time.

One of the earliest versions of the story is the version signed by Romigi de' Ricci completed in 1399. It is a translation from the Latin of Petrarca's story and is part of compendium of translations and writings from a variety of sources done for a family library. It provides evidence that as early as 1399, a version of Petrarca in Italian was available and could be compared with that of Boccaccio.[85]

The next extant text is a version by the Florentine Giovanni Sercambi which he included in his Novelle, a collection of stories written in the early 1400s.[86] The story, *De Muliere Constante* is closely related to Boccaccio's version, but Sercambi made several minor changes to the text: for the father of Griselda, he substituted her mother; he also refered to the Marchese Gualtieri as Ghellere, the Count. Furthermore in Sercambi's account the two children are sent to a relative in Paris rather than

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85 Raffaele Morabito, Una sacra rappresentazione profana; Fortune di Griselda nel Quattrocento italiano, (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993), 66-76.

86 Giovanni Sercambi, Novelle. (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1972), 1295-1306.

Bologna; the Count proposes to marry as his second wife the daughter of the Duke of Borgogna, and the name of Griselda is changed to that of Constantina.

The other two available versions are unattributed: one is a *novella* in rhymed octaves, or a *cantare*, from the end of the fourteenth century; the other is a *sacra rappresentazione*, also from the end of the fourteenth century. Both of these sources represent the use of the Griselda story as a subject in the performing arts of the time. Poetry and drama were relatively popular media which were able to reach a larger portion of the population, and were not limited to the educated.[87]

The existence of the story in many different media, aimed at different types of audience, attests to its popularity in early Renaissance culture. While the Griselda frescoes of the Roccabianca undoubtedly inherited certain motifs and themes from its predecessors in this tradition, it must, in the end be considered as another version of the tale told within a particular context. Unlike the ceiling frescoes which link more or less directly to an identifiable local tradition of illustrated astrological manuscripts, the frescoes on the walls contain allusions to a variety of sources. There is no question that the frescoes depict the Griselda story, but is that all they depict? Rather than simply attempting to identify the particular visual or literary sources for the frescoes, it is important to consider the cultural and historical context within which the frescoes were commissioned, and specifically how the frescoes fit within the artistic patronage of Pier Maria Rossi.

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87 A poetic version of the tale exists in twenty-one octaves and was first published by Domenico Maria Manni in his work Storia del Decamerone in 1742. In 1846 Vincenzo Promis discovered a manuscript which contained the poem and included a small illustration of the meeting of Griselda and Gualtieri. The *sacra rappresentazione* version divides the tale into two halves, which are further split into short scenes, and the narrative is developed through the dialogue of the characters. There is evidence that a play of the Griselda tale was performed during the 15th century and this version may be related to these productions.

Chapter 4

The Culture of the Northern Courts

Pier Maria Rossi, Count of Berceto, was a *condottiere* who worked first for Filippo Maria Visconti, and then for Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan. The Duchy of Milan was a major political centre in northern Italy. At this time, the second half of the fifteenth century, northern Italy was a combination of independent cities, towns, and small and large feudal landholdings. Some cities, such as Venice, were independent republics ruled by a municipal government, while other areas were under the direct governance of a ruling family. The largest of these was the Duchy of Milan, whose ruling family, the Visconti-Sforza, not only controlled their own territories but, through a system of feudal landownership and military alliances, became the primary overlords of much of north-western Italy.[88]

The lesser nobles and landowners like Pier Maria Rossi most often hired themselves out as *condottiere* or ambassadors to their overlords. Just as the ruling families of Milan, Ferrara and Urbino sought to further their influence with those outside their borders through marriage and diplomatic alliances, the lesser nobles, whose fortunes were linked to the influence and beneficence of these ruling families, sought to establish their own connections and political influence with each other through marriage and diplomacy.[89] At the time of the rule of Francesco Sforza, the Sforza family was connected directly through marriage to the ruling families of Urbino, Ferrara and Rimini and indirectly to the Gonzaga rulers of Mantua.

All the jurisdictions that were not independent were either under the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor or the direct control of the Papacy. While the Duke of Milan received his authority from the Emperor, and was required to pledge

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88 Randolph Starn, and Loren Partridge, Arts of Power, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 85-86. In this work they provide the example of the Marquis of Mantua, Ludovico Gonzaga, who had his own court at Mantua where he ruled a marquisate of 40,000 persons and was also the lieutenant general of Milan.

89 Mary Hollingsworth, Patronage in the Italian Renaissance, (London: John Murray Ltd, 1994), 158.

allegiance and annual dues to him, Papal States, such as Rimini, Bologna and Pesaro similarly supported the Pope. In practice, however, all were independent states, competing with each other for prestige and influence.

Hollingsworth points out that this emphasis on obtaining and retaining land holdings gave these secular courts in northern Italy an essentially military focus.[90] In their efforts to establish and hold their rights to land and prestige, they sought activities that would reinforce their military abilities as well as demonstrate their strength. Hunting on horseback, often with birds and dogs, was a popular pastime. Pageantry was important, and regular processions and festivals were used to parade the wealth and magnificence of the ruler. They often traveled with vast retinues of courtiers to visit each other or to take up residence in one of their many holdings. Their major home was usually a fortified castle with an imposing exterior but often a luxurious interior. Their other residences were also fortified dwellings which they visited regularly in order to affirm their right to the area and to retain it in their possession. They sought to reaffirm their military foundation by linking their lineage to the courts of northern Europe, and to the chivalric ideals of their medieval forebears.

The two most prominent courts in Pier Maria Rossi's time were those of the Visconti and the Sforza. It is reasonable to imagine that their splendid examples would have provided models for the courts of lesser nobility like the Rossi. The Duchy of Milan was known throughout Europe. The city had received independence from the imperial rule in 1183 and its duke, Filippo Maria Visconti (1412-1447), was the last member of a ruling family which could trace its lineage back to the first Visconti ruler in 1287. Filippo Maria Visconti's father Giangaleazzo, (1395-1402) had been an ambitious and extremely successful ruler. Under him, the Duchy expanded east to the Republic of Venice and south from the Alps to almost threaten Florence. In addition to creating this great state, he also undertook many building projects in Milan and the surrounding areas. Although Giangaleazzo had a major castle in Milan, he decided to complete and decorated the castle which his father had begun at Pavia. He chose to decorate the rooms surrounding the inner courtyard

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90 Hollingsworth, Patronage, 158.

with frescoes of hunting, jousting and other courtly scenes. The Pavia castle was also the home for the Visconti library which included numerous Christian and classical manuscripts.[91] Della Chiesa, writing between 1430 and 1440, described the residence at Pavia and noted the presence of a fresco of the story of Griselda which had been painted many years before.[92]

While the castle at Pavia continued to be an important holding, Filippo Maria Visconti, who became Duke in 1412, decided to return to the Visconti castle in Milan where he commissioned Pisanello to create frescoes for the major rooms. The uncertainty that followed his death in 1447, was resolved by the accession of Francesco Sforza, his son-in-law, whose family sought to gain legitimacy by emphasizing their relationship to their predecessors. Despite the wishes of the Milanese authorities, Francesco decided to rebuild the castle in Milan and make it a symbol of his sovereignty.[93] He also decided to refurbish and restore the castle at Pavia, and he had the frescoes that had been commissioned by Giangaleazzo returned to their former glory.[94] In an attempt to restore the good wishes of the citizens of Milan, and to give legitimacy to his rule, Francesco Sforza commissioned two hospitals as well as many churches and convents. He undertook many urban planning schemes for the rebuilding of roads and canals which enhanced the image of Milan.

The Visconti and Sforza courts were not the only courts in which a lavish culture flourished during the lifetime of Pier Maria Rossi. Their splendor was a general characteristic of court culture in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Cole describes the court as a physical space, a political context, and as the culture of the people who frequented these settings.[95] As a physical space, the court referred to the inner courtyard of the ruler's principal residence where the ruler exercised his

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91 Ibid.,163.

92 Simicik, "Affreschi di Roccabianca," 19.

93 Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Images of castles in the Renaissance: symbols of sigornia/symbols of tyranny," Art Journal 48 (1989): 130-131.

94 Evelyn Welsh, "Galeazzo Maria Sforza and the Castle at Pavia, 1469," Art Bulletin LXXI (1989): 352-353.

95 Alison Cole, Virtue and Magnificence: art of the Italian Renaissance courts, (New York: Harry N. Abrama, 1995), 11.

authority. In its political context, the term referred to all the territory under the influence of the lord. This would include smaller towns and principalities whose rulers owed allegiance to an overlord. The culture of the court was a combination of the traditional chivalric virtues and the newly discovered ethics of Greek and Roman philosophy.

The castle of the ruler was the centre of such a definition, for it was not only the major fortification for the region and the home of the ruler but also the seat of government. It was essential to the continuation of his rule and provided a secure seat for the ruler, both from external attacks and internal challenges. Because the castle had many such functions, the status of members of the household were carefully delineated. This not only established clear rules about use of a relatively small space, but also ensured that only those specifically identified could approach the ruler. In this way, the ruler and his family could distance themselves from the everyday life of the lesser nobility.

Since status was such an important feature of court life, it was carefully guarded and much sought after by the courtiers and ambassadors at the court. As Cole points out, professions such as being a soldier, lawyer or academic were the most highly regarded, and since nobility had the highest social standing, the route for those not born into noble families was through the professions to marriage and connections.[96] Even the term, noble, was not always used to differentiate people from titled families, but could also refer to hard-working people of virtue.[97] Hence, those at court sought to establish and enhance their standing through their mercantile interests and military exploits as well as their connections through marriage and employment.

Because so much of the viability of the state depended on diplomacy and knowing what was happening elsewhere, there was a constant stream of visitors to these courts. Rulers sent envoys or ambassadors to other courts, and their letters to their employers contained descriptions of the life at court as well as any information which the envoys thought would be useful in the competition for prestige. Visitors came from courts in other countries, especially from France, Spain, Germany and

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96 Ibid.,10.

Burgundy as well as from the major southern centres of Rome, Naples and Sicily. The interchange brought not only political diplomacy but the introduction of new fashions in dress, decorum, music, literature, art and architecture. It also introduced humanist ideas.

Initially, the term humanist was used to refer to those who were involved in the recovery, translation and interpretation of classical Greek and Latin texts. Eventually, the term came to refer more broadly to those who supported the idea that such texts provided the basis for contemporary human learning and that, through an education in Latin, individuals would be better able to discuss such ideas and understand the relationship of the present with the past.[98] Although the initial emphasis was on learning the ancient languages, and on accurate translation of new-found texts, the emphasis soon shifted to the provision of an education focused on the humanities: grammar, rhetoric, style, literature, moral philosophy and history.

Begun as a literary movement separate from civic life, the ideals of the humanist movement were soon recognized by the political rulers of the times. They gave their children a humanist education because they saw a direct link between the values of glory and honor that they espoused and to which they aspired, and the glory and honor of the ancients. These rulers saw immediate value in learning statecraft, and in studying the descriptions of military strategy in ancient texts. Moreover as Cole puts it, the ethics and values evident in these texts "provided them with a moral framework within which to construct their public and private lives".[99] Finally, the rulers of the Renaissance, encouraged the writing of histories of their families, which linked them with actual and mythical figures from ancient times. Such writings served to glorify the present state and its inhabitants and solidify relations among the associates of the ruler.

Many humanist scholars were employed as administrative secretaries or chancellors and worked very closely with the rulers themselves. The abilities of the scholars, who were trained in rhetoric to employ the tools of argumentation, could be turned towards both propaganda and politics. In many instances these humanists

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97 Denys Hay, The Age of the Renaissance, (New York: Bonanza Books, 1986), 27.
98 Ibid., 9.
99 Cole, Virtue and Magnificence, 11.

were essential mediators between the ruler and the leaders of the neighboring principalities. Through diplomacy they helped create the public persona of the court.

A specific example of the type of task undertaken by humanist secretaries was the preparation of commentaries by the Simonetta brothers for the writing of a history of their lord, Francesco Sforza. First they drew up a rough narrative with specifics of the Duke's life, which could then be used by a humanist scholar to write a history in the best literary tradition. In this they were not unusual. Many contemporary rulers were having such commentaries compiled for future use. Ianziti suggests that this was one way of ensuring that present policies and past activities were interpreted in the ruler's favor and that the person best suited to compiling and frequently writing such histories was the person most closely connected to the actual formulation of the public policies.[100]

Another aspect of the influence of humanist thinking on the rulers of the northern courts was evident in their patronage of the arts. As a mark of their wealth and prestige, courts like Milan sought to recruit the best artists to design and decorate their palaces. Artists, too, sought out state rulers as patrons, since the variety and number of projects the ruler commissioned often ensured that the artist had a steady income. These rulers involved themselves directly in the design and implementation of many of their projects through which they sought to reflect the magnificence and virtue of the court and its ruler.[101]

They employed humanist architects, whose designs would integrate the use of antique architectural forms and contemporary functionality. They supported the translation of antique texts and the purchase of books and antiquities to form their personal libraries and collections. They saw the arts as an opportunity not only to demonstrate their own wealth and virtue but also to declare the richness and strength of their court.

The court at Ferrara is a good example of the avid patronage of the arts by princely rulers. It was ruled by Leonello d'Este (1441-50) and his brother Borso (1450-1471) who through their patronage of the arts, developed a vibrant culture at

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100 Gary Ianziti, Humanist Historiography under the Sforzas. (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1988) 310-311.

their court. According to Denys Hay: "It was a society that gave new life to medieval ideals of courtesy and chivalry, inspiring and entertaining itself with the French and Italian romances in which the ducal library was especially rich."[102]

The Este family had several frescoed residences where they spent most of their time and their court was visited by many important artists from whom they commissioned specific works. One of the most important commissions at the court of Ferrara was the Room of the Months in the Palazzo Schifanoia painted between the late 1460s and early 1470s. It is based on a humanist program and celebrates the good government of Borso d'Este within what Cole notes as "a seasonal and astrological framework."[103] It is in the main meeting room of the palace, and the Duke himself is a major figure on each of the four lower panels.

Another important patron of the arts was the ruler of the courtly center of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro (1444-1482). Federico, one of the most successful *condottiere* of his age, was known for his patronage of the arts as well as his military prowess. One of his famous commissions was the double portraits of himself and his wife Battista Sforza which he had painted by Piero della Francesca. These portraits reveal the humanist virtues of decency, dignity and modesty outlined in Alberti's On Painting.[104]

On one side of the diptych they are shown facing each other against an expansive landscape. Battista is shown against an evening landscape of gathering shadows while Federico's background is bathed with dawn light. Battista is shown with fine blonde hair and pale skin, a reflection not only of her earthly beauty but of her virtuous nature and recent death. She is depicted wearing rich brocade, pearls and jewels, while Federico wears a plain red gown and hat. Together the portraits suggest the grandeur, order, virtue and nobility of the sitters. The reverse portraits provide further allegorical references which link Federico and Battista with classical and Christian symbols and eulogize the Ducal title of Federico.

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101 Welsh, "Galeazzo Maria Sforza," 352-75.
102 Hay, The Age of the Renaissance, 64.
103 Cole, Virtue and Magnificence, 131.
104 Ibid., 86.

The court at Mantua was under the rule of Ludovico Gonzaga (1444-1478). He, like his noble contemporaries, was interested in intellectual ideas and commissioned artists to produce such works as medals, paintings and frescoes to glorify his court. In 1458, Ludovico commissioned Mantegna to paint the Camera Picta, a small square chamber on the first floor. One wall of the frescoes depicts the Gonzaga family and their court with an idealized landscape behind them and on the adjoining wall, his sons, Francesco Gonzaga, the newly appointed cardinal, and his heir Federico Gonzaga, are shown meeting their father at Bozzolo on the border with the Duchy of Milan. The ceiling contains portrait medallions of ancient Roman emperors embedded in an illusionistic stucco molding. In the oculus and lunettes, Mantegna used figures from classical mythology.

These frescoes depict the prestige and magnificence of a classical ruler and the relationship of the court to the traditions of ancient Rome. The frescoes were in a room which Ludovico used both as a bedroom and a meeting room with intimate guests. In such surroundings, his visitors could not fail to observe the classical orientation, the richness of the court, the attributes of the family, and their network of important friends and relatives. Two scenes in the Camera Picta portray the two roles of the marquis, as head of the court accompanied by his family and advisors, and as man of action, and father with links to the Church and to the other ruling families of Europe.

As is evident from this brief overview of the culture at the Northern courts, the influence of humanist thinking upon the courts was mixed with older military and chivalric ideals which gave these centres their unique character. The ideals of chivalry, which came from England and France were adopted by many of the Emperor's Germanic courts. The northern Italian courts also had close ties with France and the culture and literature of medieval France was still popular there in the middle of the fifteenth century.

Until the end of the fourteenth century, medieval French was the dominant literary language of northern Italy.[105] The libraries of the Este and Gonzaga families contained many manuscripts of chivalric romances in French and it was through their French versions that the stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, Lancelot, the story of Tristan and Isolde and the Quest for the Holy Grail became popular.[106] Niccolò III of Este gave many of his children names from the Arthurian romances and, besides the Arthurian fresco cycle by Pisanello completed for Federico Gonzaga of Mantua, there are other chivalric frescoes which survive in smaller centres. Illustrations from the romances were popular subject matter for manuscripts, tapestries and other cultural objects. The widespread use of these themes indicates the popular appeal of the stories of the knights, the original *condottieri*, to the rulers and their courts.

The chivalric ideals involved a combination of heroic virtues such as valor, steadfastness, and bravery with personal virtues of courtesy, purity, honor, and brotherly love. The knights and their successors used warfare and military combat to illustrate their pursuit of these ideals. Between such pursuits, they displayed their skills through hunting expeditions in search of game, as well as through recreational pageantry where mock combats were held.

Through their actions, moral virtue and social rank came together in a fuller understanding of the meaning of nobility.[107] The members of the northern Italian courts sought to link their lives to the cycle of exploits illustrated in the chivalric stories by modeling their lives after their heroes. The condottieri saw themselves reflected in the lives of these earlier leaders, and through their courts sought to emulate the easy atmosphere, organized existence, and clear hierarchies of the world of these heroes where "noble birth, beautiful appearance and courtly manners" were highly prized.[108] In the knights, who were a small select group of men connected by familial relationships, the rulers could see themselves, a similar select group interrelated by family and marriage.

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105 Joanna Woods-Marden, The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 23.

106 Ibid., 21.

107 Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture, (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1976), 161.

In a world where class consciousness was increasing, the exploits of the heroes were a confirmation of nobility especially for those whose origins were more bourgeois. The rituals of chivalry provided a narrative of continuity and security in a rapidly changing world of political intrigues and military campaigns.[109] Being a military commander was a position of social prestige, and depictions of military battles focused on the individual exploits of a modern Lancelot and his heroic achievements. The emphasis on pageantry was a playing out of the chivalric ideals as well as a concrete example of the wealth and magnificence of the court and its direct relationship to these ideals.

At the same time, the world of chivalry was a world of fantasy and pleasure, of adventure and romance. Dante suggested that the romantic tales were principally used for entertainment at court, but while the pageantry and jousts that enacted activities from these tales might have supported his opinion, the emphasis on courtesy in the formal social interactions of the court would indicate that the fantastical and the real were closely intertwined.

Although the *condottieri* of the northern courts may have enjoyed their use of chivalric displays and read the French romances based on chivalric tales, there is no evidence that they followed closely the rules of chivalry concerning knights and their behavior. Instead, while they continued to support and enjoy the chivalric traditions, they were reshaping them within humanist ideals and the northern Italian context.

Marriages were a very important feature of society. Arranged for political and economic interests of the family, often when the individuals were still in their mid teens, there was only an expectation that the couple would manage to live together amicably and produce heirs.[110] Passionate love was not necessarily therefore an aspect of marriage, but political relationships tempered the public taking of a lover where the family of the spouse could object. Instead, using the conventions of courtly love from their chivalric romances, the potential lovers were transformed into a "beloved lady" and her knight.

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108 Woods-Marden, The Gonzaga of Mantua, 149.
109 Diane Bornstein, Mirrors of Courtesy, (Hamden, Ct.: Archon Press, 1975), 110.
110 Klapisch-Zuber, Women, Family, and Ritual, 117-132.

The notion of courtly love is highly contested in literary circles since the term itself was not used in medieval times. Neither is the notion easily captured in a single definition but rather contains multiple ideas whose tensions were part of the basic notion itself. It was elaborated through medieval poetry, and Vivavier points out that although it was "primarily a matter of controversy, a rich source of dilemma," "love versus honor" was one of the central issues of courtly love.[111]

Part of what emerges from examination of romances such as Guillaume de Lorris' "Roman de la Rose" or Chrétien de Troyes' "Erec and Enide" is an allegorical recipe for the pursuit of love. The man who falls in love was supposed to humbly serve his lady. Once the lady agreed to consider his suit, the man agreed to abide by her wishes and do whatever tasks she proposed. There was an expectation that these tasks were trials on the journey and successful completion of them through patience and personal anguish would contribute not only to his success but more importantly to the enhancement of his honor and the prestige of his position. In a sense, the woman became the liege lord, and the man the vassal pledging allegiance and obedience. The lady's identity was usually masked by the use of a pseudonym, and secrecy was required since revealing her name was not an act of true love. Throughout this ordeal the man was allowed one confidant. In both the Roman de la Rose and the story of Erec and Enide, the couple are eventually united.

Since these stories were written as part of chivalric tradition, the tasks of the man might well include his jousting at tournaments and his undertaking of mythic trials in order to conquer his love. It was important that the love was mutual and freely given, in contrast to the arranged nature of marriages. Such love sustained the knight through the trials, and became elevated into a moral and spiritual love, since it didn't depend on formal promises or mere physical attraction.[112]

Through the works of Dante and Petrarca, these medieval courtly ideals of love were elevated above human passion and transformed into a relationship which

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111 Eugene Vivaver, "Landmarks of Arthurian Romance," In The Expansion and Transformation of Courtly Literature. ed. Nathaniel B. Smith and Joseph T. Snow. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 18.

idealized the woman and made her unattainable; as such she became a heavenly figure of consummate virtue and the ultimate goal became spiritual salvation rather than earthly love. Petrarca sought to combine the sense of passion involved in earthly love with its denial and transmutation to a purified form through meditation on the virtues of the unattainable beloved. He used many paradoxical concepts in concrete images to raise this tension such as "icy fire," "life in death" and "lovely agony." He referred to the dualism of the woman as "sweet enemy." Petrarca also used military imagery in the sense of love as war, an image repeated in the second half of the Roman de la Rose. Later poets, especially in Italy, adopted these paradoxical conceits but wrote about the courtship associated with a profane rather than a sacred love.[113]

The ideals of humanism, the traditions of chivalry and the conventions of courtly love provided the princes of the northern Italian courts with a rich context for the exploration of concrete forms within art and literature. These *condottiere*/princes were educated men, generally acknowledged to be learned, and with the resources to fulfill their ambitions to build edifices and decorate them in ways which would exemplify their interest in the intellectual pursuits of the time. Through such undertakings, they sought not only to bring glory to themselves and their courts, but also, some more than others, to expand artistic boundaries through the portrayal of humanist and chivalric ideas.

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112 Terence Scully, "The Sen of Chrètien de Troyes's Joie de la Cort," In The Expansion and Transformation of Courtly Literature. ed. Nathaniel B. Smith and Joseph T. Snow. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 91.

113 Leonard Forster, The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 2-8.

Chapter 5

The Artistic Patronage of Pier Maria Rossi

While he did not rule over a court as rich or prestigious as those at Ferrara, Rimini, Urbino or Mantua, Pier Maria Rossi was also a skilled *condottiere* who had been able to gain a relatively large numbers of holdings surrounding Parma. His skill in protecting and extending his territory in battle, and his political acumen in supporting Francesco Sforza in the period between 1447 and 1450 after Filippo Maria Visconti's death, led to his receiving a gift of lands and castles from Francesco Sforza and to his being proclaimed "father of the homeland and the protector of the Parmense freedom." For a short period between 1477 and 1479 Rossi was one of the senior deputy governors of the state of Milan.

A frequent visitor to the Visconti-Sforza court and probably to others, Pier Maria Rossi followed their example and undertook various artistic commissions during his lifetime, which indicate his understanding of the major intellectual ideas that were being discussed in the northern Italian courts. His documented commissions include medals, poetry and frescoed rooms.

Pier Maria Rossi undertook various commissions which reflect his perceptions of himself as a noble ruler. One of these commissions was the striking of medals by Gianfrancesco Enzola in 1455. The popularity of medals has been attributed to Leonello d'Este, who saw them not only as ways to keep the person on the medal in the consciousness of the receiver, but also as a means of recalling the relationship between present rulers and those on ancient coins. Following this humanist inclination, Pier Maria Rossi had medals struck of himself and Bianca Pelligrini.

In 1455, the first medal he had commissioned was dedicated to himself. It was inscribed *"Petrvs Maria De Rvbeis B'Ceti Comes Ac Tvrisciare Fondator."* (Fig.12a) On the front of this medal is a portrait bust and on the reverse is a tower with two birds sitting on it, beside it is a pilgrim's staff with a wallet hanging from it. The reverse of this medal was used also for one of the medals Pier Maria had struck in 1457. On the front of this medal is a portrait bust of a woman encircled by the inscription *"Divae Blanchinae Cumanae Simulacrum MCCCCLVII"*(Fig.12b). Also in

1457, Pier Maria Rossi had commissioned from Enzola, a medal with a similar portrait busts on the front and with the inscription "*D Blanchine R Simulacrum*"(Fig 12c). On the reverse is the figure of a woman walking with a pilgrim-staff in front of two castles. One other undated medal exists which has portrait bust of Pier Maria and Bianca Pelligrini juxtaposed on the front and back of the medal respectively (Fig 12d). The figures portrayed on all the medals can be identified as Pier Maria and Bianca Pelligrini through the use of inscriptions and *imprese*. The inscriptions which encircle the portrait busts name the figures and the *imprese* such as the pilgrim's staff and the wallet, which were attributes of Bianca Pelligrini, provide allegorical references to the people they represent.

In the 1450s, in order to secure his territories, Pier Maria Rossi began a major rebuilding and refurbishing of his twenty-seven castles and fortified holdings.[114] Much of this was to enhance their military fortifications but in two castles Torrechiara and Roccabianca, he also undertook internal decorations.

The castle of Torrechiara came into the Rossi family in 1365. According to an inscription above the drawbridge entrance to the castle, recorded by Carrari a century later, the rebuilding of the castle of Torrechiara was begun in May, 1448, and completed towards the end of 1459.[115] The Sala d'Oro is decorated with frescoes which illustrate rituals of courtly love against a background of the land and castles of Pier Maria Rossi.

Above a 3 meter high dado of terracotta tiles painted red and blue, and stamped in relief with four repeating designs the four walls of the square room, 7.6 x 7.9 meters rise to a vaulted ceiling, 8.5 meters above the floor. Together the lunettes of the four walls, and the decorations on the ceiling form a program which can be read on a number of levels. Firstly it is a depiction of chivalric ideals; secondly, it is a specific depiction of Pier Maria Rossi and his relationship to his beloved lady within the traditions of courtly love; and thirdly, it is a reference to the actual historical relationship of Pier Maria Rossi and his mistress, Bianca Pelligrini.

The scene in the first lunette on the eastern wall takes place within a pavilion which has a classical form. It depicts an amor, a blind-folded adolescent child,

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114 Pelicelli, Pier Maria Rossi, 44; Woods-Marsden, "Pictorial legitimation," 557.

standing on a pedestal, who has just shot arrows at the man and woman who stand one on each side and each with an arrow in their breasts. The scene in the adjacent lunette on the south wall also takes place within an interior space whose exterior pillars are lined with illustrated panels. The man is shown kneeling on one knee beside the woman from whom he is receiving a sword. He is dressed in knightly armor and she wears a dress of rich brocade. On the adjoining west wall, the lunette depicts the man again, kneeling on one knee in front of the woman. He is no longer in armor but holds a staff. She is crowning him with a circlet of leaves. The scene takes place in a loggia in front of a pavilion.

In the remaining lunette on the north wall the scene takes place inside a pavilion. The man and woman are depicted on either side of a central window. They face the viewer. The man on the right wears a full set of armor, while the woman to his left holds a white cloth in her left hand and has a crown hovering over her head. She is gesturing with her right hand. In all four lunettes the figures are depicted larger than life.

The four pavilions in the lunettes are placed in an open air garden where *putti* chase each other, tease animals and play instruments. Flowers and small flowering shrubs surround the pavilions, while in the distance are displayed large fortified castles. In the background to the scene in the north lunette, to the right of the man is depicted the castle of San Secondo. To the left of the woman in the same lunette is a depiction of Roccabianca. Next to the vault, each lunette is edged by a garland of cloth which is drawn up and bound like the edge of a pavilion. On the edge above the dado is a inscription "Digne et in aeternum," meaning revered worthily forever, which, separated by a heart with a sun behind it, is repeated constantly around the room.

On the base of the ceiling is a similar landscape of castles each of which is named. Woods-Marsden has shown how these depictions are related to the actual geographic placement of the castles. The castles in each lunette and section of the vault reflect their relative positions as actual parts of Pier Maria Rossi's territorial

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115 Pelicelli, Pier Maria Rossi, 19.

holdings. Taken together, the frescoes are like a topographical map, which could be easily read by contemporaries.

Standing in the centre of each of these four landscape sections of the vault is a woman. In each scene she is shown below a small radiant sun striding across the landscape or looking out towards the viewer. Many attributes identify her as a pilgrim, she wears a cloak and on its shoulder is embroidered a scallop shell and two crossed keys, symbols of the pilgrim saints, St. James and St. Roch. She carries a deeply crowned hat, staff and wallet, other traditional symbols of the pilgrim. She also flourishes a long white sash.

The frescoes in the Sala d'Oro clearly illustrate the importance of chivalric values in the desires of the patron. The vault with its depiction of the pilgrim can be read as a reference to the quest of the knights and the pilgrimages which were connected to the holy places of the Crusades. Similarly, the sequence of the knight in the lunettes who dons armor and wins land on behalf of his lady is honored with a garland of victory. The pavilions also reflect the temporary nature of the entertainments of the knights whose major activities were their involvement in perilous quests.

Interwoven with the theme of chivalry are the conventions of courtly love. The scene in the eastern lunette depicts the surprise attack by amor, which overwhelms the couple in the Garden of Love. It suggests that this mutual attraction was not of their doing but the will of the gods. The giving of the sword in the south lunette suggests not only the preparation for battle but also symbolizes of the giving of one's heart within the convention of courtly love.

The knight in partial armor is defenseless against this offer. In the west lunette, the knight is crowned by his beloved. These are not only the laurels of victory, potentially reflecting his acquisition of the castles and the defense of the land depicted in the background of the frescoes, but also his acceptance of the difficulties the relationship poses. This meaning is reinforced by the use of two symbols, a seraphim in the tympanum of the pavilion and radiant heart crossed with the inscription "in aeternum," meaning in eternity. Together they suggest that the knight and the lady are prisoners of their undying love. In the fourth lunette, the

woman is shown with symbols of marriage. The shorter dress, the crown and the white cloth are all important signs of marriage.[116] The crown may well relate to that on the Rossi insignia, with its promise of a permanent relationship, besides the more obvious notion of being the queen of his heart. The cloth suggests the favor of the man and the virtue of the woman. A white cloth, signifying his soul purified by penance, was worn on the shoulder by a new knight until he had achieved some honor and then his lady would cut it off and keep it as a token.[117] Altogether, these symbols seem to suggest that the couple has taken the vows of a spiritual marriage.

When they are compared, the figures in each scene seem to represent the same person. Many scholars suggest that there is a resemblance between the depictions and the portraits on medals of Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini. Regardless of whether the frescoes were an accurate likeness to these two people, there are many other symbols and *imprese* which provide support for these attributions. They include the interwoven letters, the heart, the motto "nunc et semper," meaning, now and always, the running border, "digne et in aeternum," the white cloth for Bianca, meaning white, and the pun on Pelligrini, which means pilgrims.

The multiple reading of the frescoes as depictions of chivalric ideals and courtly love combined with its landscape of actual conquests suggest that Pier Maria Rossi was well versed in the French romance traditions of chivalry and courtly love. The inclusion of actual castles and the possible likenesses, when combined with the multiple symbolic references to Bianca Pelligrini provide another reading of the frescoes as influenced by ideas on the importance of his illustrious heritage, and of his *de facto* relationship with Bianca.

Another of Rossi's commissions was a poem written in 1463 by Gerardo Rustici of Piacenza. The poem, which was presented to Pier Maria Rossi on New Year's Day, 1464, was entitled *Cantilena pro Potenti D. Petro Maria Rubeo Berceti Comite Magnifco et Noceti Domino.* This panegyric describes Rossi, his wife, Antonia and his children as well as major holdings.[118] The title and the epilogue of the poem are in Latin but the body of the work is in vernacular Italian. The poem begins with

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116 Ibid., 9.

117 Bornstein, Mirrors of Courtesy, 89.

118 Pezzana, Storia, appendix IV, 39.

praise and honor to the great lord, Pier Maria Rossi, and then elaborates first the virtues of his wife Antonia, as mother of prudence and full of knowledge, and then those of each of his children. The poet next describes Pier Maria's holdings, naming many of them and describing Torrechiara specifically. In describing the frescoes of the Camera d'Oro, the poet makes reference to the figures of the pilgrim and the traveller; these are indirect references to Bianca Pelligrini through puns on her name. The word, Bianca, is closely related to traveller and Pelligrini to pilgrim.

The poem, meant to be read aloud, was a public testament to the capabilities, strength, and honor of Pier Maria Rossi as evidenced through the virtues of his family and the numbers and magnificence of his holdings. Few members of his court would have recognized the private references to his muse, and to her place as the spiritual guide of his travels. The ability to write such poems was considered the mark of a humanist courtier and although Pier Maria Rossi did not write this poem himself, his ability to understand the different roles which are indicated in the poem suggests his awareness of the multiple uses of the panegyric.

It is only against the backdrop of these other commissions that we can come to a fuller understanding of the frescoes at Roccabianca. The frescoes were first dated by Affo in 1796, to be between 1458 and 1465 based on the presence of the papal seal of Pope Pius II. Documentation identified the reconstruction of the castle as taking place between 1450 and 1463, and the castle was given to Bianca Pelligrini in a testament in 1464. However, while it would seem probable that the castle was decorated before this date, it may well have been completed between 1465 and 1474, since the position of the figures in scene II of Gualtieri and Giannucolo seem to be based on those of Ludovico and his courtier in the family scene in the Camera Picta of 1458-65. It is unlikely that the frescoes were undertaken after 1474 since from that period, Pier Maria Rossi was involved first in a continuous conflict with his neighbors, the Vescovi, and then with Ludovico, Il Moro.

The castle of Roccabianca was completed at approximately the same time as Torrechiara but we cannot be sure that both were frescoed within the same decade. While the Sala d'Oro was based on images from chivalric romances, the frescoes at Roccabianca focus on the story of Griselda. Most interpretations of the frescoes at Roccabianca have focused on the correspondence in likeness between Gualtieri and Griselda and Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini. However, this method of investigation may have overlooked the multiple levels of allusion common in frescoes

of this period. Like the frescoes in the Sala d'Oro at Torrechiara, the frescoes in the Camera di Griselda can be viewed as containing references to both chivalric conventions and humanist ideals.

At its most obvious narrative level, the story of Griselda is a story which described the patience and devotion of a peasant woman whose virtue elevates not only herself but eventually her husband. While the story may seem harsh to modern readers, the notion of virtue as the ultimate good was a common theme in Medieval and Renaissance literature. The testing of characters to reveal their inner values was a theme shared with medieval chivalric romances.

The marquis, Gualtieri, is shown in the frescoes enjoying hunting and hawking and it is against this typical background of courtly pleasure that he is persuaded by his courtiers to take a wife. Knowledgeable viewers of the fresco cycle would have recognized the dilemma between the freedom symbolized by the pleasures of hunting

and hawking and the responsibilities of making an appropriate choice in marriage, which would bring honor not only to the ruler but to his subjects.[119]

Gualtieri chooses a wife who is physically beautiful and so, like Erec, in the story of Erec and Enide, he forgoes his honor as a knightly ruler for carnal love. However, her obedience and indulgence to his wishes is revealed in her actions and her virtue is enhanced when she is dressed in the attire of the court. But while Gualtieri recognizes her courtly attributes of attractiveness and goodwill, he decides to test her, since he is unsure of the depth of her virtue. The testing is a failure on his part to recognize her true nature. In the end, he sees her virtue and the story culminates in a grand feast celebrating the reunion of the ruler, his wife and their children.

Like many medieval romances, the story as presented in the frescoes, is in two parts; the initial meeting, ending with their wedding feast, then the trials ending with their reunion banquet. It might be expected that viewers of the frescoes would have been familiar with the recurrent themes from chivalric tales aspects of which can be read in the Griselda frescoes. They would have recognized the importance of the trials as a means to test the relationship of Gualtieri and Griselda, and to restore honor to Gualtieri through his rejection of her and Griselda's constant devotion to him. Gualtieri eventually takes the step of renouncing the original marriage with its inherent imbalance in the relationship since he had taken control of Griselda's actions through the oaths of obedience he demanded from her. It is only then that he is finally able to see her as her virtuous self and hence to reenter a new union where the relationship is more moral and spiritual.

The numerous courtiers and ladies in waiting evident throughout the frescoes not only provide support for the magnificence of Gualtieri's court, but also define the context within which his actions take place. In many scenes their facial expressions seem to support what Gualtieri is doing, while in others, for example, the women surrounding Griselda when he announces the annulment of their marriage, show sadness for what has happened to her. They provide an entry point for the viewer

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119 The contest of individual prowess as a free knight versus the potential of cowardice as an outcome of married love was well known.

who, like them, would have felt the tension between Gualtieri's actions and Griselda's patience.

The ceiling with its astrological figures provides some association to "identities" of the major figures. The use of specific *imprese*, and their placement within the astrological calendar suggest that the figures of Gualtieri and Griselda may be associated with Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini. These *imprese* are similar to those used on the tiles in the Camera d'Oro, where the identity of the woman is hinted at in many other ways.

Besides the themes of medieval chivalry which are interwoven in the frescoes of the Camera di Griselda, the frescoes also contain a portrait of courtly love within a humanist context. The story of Griselda, with its literary roots in the works of Boccaccio and Petrarca, was itself an initiative which linked medieval cosmology and humanist ideals. The humanist viewer, would have seen the frescoed walls and ceiling as a whole. Together, they would suggest the relationship between earthly life and the divine realm. Earthly life was a struggle to obtain moral perfection within one's status in society. The events of the Griselda story illustrate that struggle for each of the main characters. Griselda, whose moral and spiritual beauty is more than might be expected for her lowly station, provides an example of how virtue can overcome seemingly impossible trials and usher in a new society of justice, peace and good government. Gualtieri's trials are seen as his attempts to ensure that virtue is truly present and that he has made the right choice in a marriage, which is meant to demonstrate and ensure the reputation of the court. He is a ruler who illustrates his own magnanimity through his search for the virtuous life.

The events in the lives of Gualtieri and Griselda can be viewed as the struggle between earthly passion and heavenly virtue. Virtue, human moral perfection, was obtained through a war between the passion of the body and the soul's desire to seek the good life. The ending of the Griselda story should convince the viewer that through personal choice, the pursuit of virtue could lead to a heavenly paradise where passion and virtue could be reconciled.

Since the identification of figures in frescoes was a common occurrence in contemporary northern frescoes, it is probable that viewers would have sought to associate the figures of Gualtieri and Griselda with earthly equivalents. The identification was not meant as a direct correspondence between the actual historical person and the actions of the painted figure. Rather that the artistic

representation of the figure illustrated virtues which were meant to reflect those of the actual individual.

To rely on physical likeness as the criterion for identifying historical figures within the artistic representation is problematic. As discussed earlier, representations of individuals within poetic or artistic constructs relied on idealized characteristics which served to illustrate the virtues of the person, while retaining a cursory physiognomic resemblance. Dempsey, among others, has explored this notion of the allegorical portrait.[120] He contends that while some portraits are representations of real people, because of the specificity of their clothing and easily identifiable facial features, they are also shown as conforming to the contemporary ideal of beauty. In a discussion of several works, he notes, "the question of portrait and imaginative re-creation, of the interplay between reality and poetic representation, is not easily resolved, and certainly not by a simplistic appeal to 'common sense'." [121] In his discussion, Dempsey highlights the issue of the identification of real people in imaginative scenes. He points out that, because of the courtly conventions of depicting individuals within certain abstracted representations, specific identification is made particularly problematic. He notes that, without additional documentation it is difficult to identify figures as specific people especially when some of these are posthumous portraits. For women, the combinations of courtly convention, the contemporary ideal of beauty, and allegorical rhetoric are often interwoven and hard to separate. Hence, specific portraits may well be based on a real person, but bear little actual resemblance, unless the person herself approximates the ideal of beauty and the image of the beloved.

This problem is quite evident in the Griselda frescoes. While it would not seem farfetched to link the figure of Gualtieri, who sought to achieve an earthly paradise, with the person of Pier Maria Rossi, who sought to establish a Rossi dynasty, it is much more difficult to make a direct correspondence between Griselda and either his real wife, Antonia Torelli, or his courtly lady, Bianca Pelligrini. This

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120 Charles Dempsey, The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 145-148.

121 Ibid., 133.

ambiguity may have been deliberate. Furthermore, within the conventions of courtly love, the name of the beloved would have been kept secret from others while within humanist ideals, the emphasis was on the beloved as a spiritual figure. This is very apparent in the Torrechiara frescoes where Bianca is only cryptically "named" through her association with the pilgrim.

As in poetry, the convention of the times in portraiture was to emphasize the ideal qualities of the sitter and to leave few clues as to her actual identity, so that it became completed submerged in a depiction of the ideal. The beloved lady, like Dante's Beatrice or Petrarca's Laura was the agent of love. The convention of the poetry of love required a conception of a beloved lady chosen by the lover. According to Dempsey, she was to hold a double meaning: that of love, which was identifiable on a public universal level, and that of the beloved which could only be seen privately by the lover. The tension of the two roles of the beloved lady formed the essence of her function in vernacular love poetry and in the visual arts. These two levels of meaning of the beloved lady were augmented by the recognition that the beloved lady was usually an historical figure as well as being a poetic construct.

The frescoes of Griselda do not illustrate directly the literary sources from which they take inspiration but rather weave their own poetic narrative infused with contemporary meanings. Their appeal to Rossi and other contemporary viewers may have been highlighted by the multiple levels of meanings in the frescoes. The ability to read these various meanings would have established the erudition and political acumen of the viewer. For Rossi himself and for Bianca, the frescoes and *imprese* may have been another manifestation of their ideal relationship.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The son of an important *condottiere* at the Visconti court, Pier Maria Rossi grew up in an atmosphere that prized artistic achievements, military prowess, intellectual ideas and international relations. The court of Milan, which formed a major focus for his world view flowered first under Filippo Maria Visconti, then under Francesco Sforza and finally under Galeazzo Maria who married Bona of Savoy. Each ruler in turn sought to glorify his reign and illustrate his power through a wide range of artistic commissions. These courts were also centres of intellectual discussion and international comparisons as members of the court heard about, discussed, read and refuted contemporary ideas from the major cultural centres of Europe as well as from the neighboring Northern Italian courts.

As a member of the court, Pier Maria Rossi, who spoke French and Spanish, must have participated in these discussions. Since visits to other courts, both as courtiers accompanying the Duke and as his official envoys, were common, it is likely that Pier Maria Rossi must have visited the other Northern courts. He would have participated in the discussions with other visitors and resident scholars and observed the behaviors of their rulers, former *condottiere* who were now major landowners. Marchesi notes that Giorgio Anselmi's decision to translate a version of De Musica into Latin was sparked by a conversation with Pier Maria Rossi.[122] It is possible that Pier Maria Rossi initially adopted the orientation of an early Renaissance ruler because he wished to emulate his liege lord, but there is more evidence that he fully subscribed to these ideas as his artistic commissions reveal.

In his commissions, Pier Maria Rossi integrated older medieval chivalric traditions with the new humanist ideas of the Renaissance. This was true also for other rulers such as Ludovico Gonzaga of Mantua, but the orientation towards personal aggrandizement evident in their courts is what separates the commissions

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122 Gustavo Marchesi, Storia di Parma, (Rome: Newton Compton, 1994), 63.

of the other Northern rulers from those of Pier Maria Rossi. All of Rossi's commissions are thematically connected through the notion of the beloved lady.

This theme, which has its roots in medieval chivalric traditions but was reworked within humanist ideals by Petrarca among others, has an important place in Rossi's world view. The notion of a beloved lady, both as an artistic motif and as an actual historical figure, provides additional layers of meaning to his commissions.

The actual person accepted as Pier Maria Rossi's beloved lady was Bianca Pelligrini, a lady of Como married to Melchiore d'Arluno. The patron's search for virtue which can be supported through the desire to be worthy of the beloved lady infuses all references to her. Besides depicting her directly, her name provides allegorical references to these ideals. Particularly in the fresco cycle at Torrechiara, she assumes allegorical significance as the pilgrim, the seeker of virtue, while at Roccabianca, the renamed and whitewashed castle is easily linked to her first name, Bianca.

Initially, art historians sought a direct correspondence between the artistic depictions at Torrechiara and Roccabianca and their physical likeness to the figures of Pier Maria Rossi and Bianca Pelligrini. When compared with the medals, the portraits are similar, but to read the frescoes as straightforward depiction of historical figures is to miss the layers of meaning that involve both chivalric traditions and humanist ideas.

The frescoes at Torrechiara most explicitly illustrate the complex relationship between the prince and his beloved lady. The decorations of the frescoed room in Torrechiara are of a secular nature and they take their subject from events in the life of a knight. In each scene, the relationship of Bianca and Pier Maria Rossi is depicted allegorically against a background of Rossi's land holdings. Above this world, Bianca as the pilgrim, slightly larger than life, strides across this landscape. She is both connected to Rossi through her involvement in his knightly endeavors and yet above his earthly realm in her search for virtue. The use of the Latin inscriptions, "nunc et semper", now and always, and "digne et in aeternum", revered worthily forever, further support the contention that the program of the room was designed in honor of Bianca as a poetic concept of love. Through the use of *imprese* of the Rossi and Pelligrini families, these frescoes are identifiable with the patron and his lady through the traditions associated with chivalry, the ideals of humanism, and the conventions governing the use of allegorical portraiture.

The frescoes in Roccabianca form part of the same thematic program although their overt relationship to Pier Maria and Bianca is more subdued. Unfortunately, the dado, which covered the bottom of the walls has been destroyed, and the continuous band of inscriptions is no longer legible. Hence, we do not know if they contained overt allusions to their relationship, which is subtly hinted at in the *imprese* of the ceiling.

In Roccabianca, the use of a well-known story to illustrate the burdens faced by the main protagonists allows the patron and his beloved lady to be both themselves and the allegorical figures in the narrative. This allusion is strengthened when the frescoes on the ceiling and walls of the room are considered as a single program.

Like the frescoes of Torrechiara, the Griselda cycle at Roccabianca can be read on a number of levels. First, in its most obvious aspect, it is the retelling of the story of Gualtieri and Griselda, which takes elements from a number of literary and visual sources to create its own unique narrative. Secondly, the figures in the story can be read not only as Gualtieri and Griselda but also as Pier Maria Rossi and a virtuous lady, the beloved Bianca.

Thirdly, the frescoes can be interpreted within the conventions of humanist scholarship. Their emphasis on the importance of good government as an attribute of the noble ruler, the linking of virtue with action, and the spiritual beneficence of a beloved lady were all important characteristics within the humanist culture of the northern courts. The frescoes serve to highlight the attributes of the patron, the noble ruler, and the difficult decisions he made on behalf of his subjects. They also illustrate the importance of the virtuous lady as a beneficial presence who elevated the quality of social interaction and general well-being of people at the court.

Fourthly, although it is less evident than in the frescoes at Torrechiara, the chivalric tradition is continued through the theme of the search for moral virtue through reverence for the beloved lady. Griselda bore with patience and constancy the difficulties which befell her, just as the knight, Pier Maria Rossi, has to overcome obstacles in his search for moral virtue and honor. In this version, Griselda is not to be considered as a physical wife, but as his spiritual guide whom he rejects a number of times before he recognizes her worth. Both chivalric and humanist perspectives combine in elevating the position of women to that of a virtuous and idealized

beloved in whose service the patron achieves honor and magnificence through this moral and spiritual love.

Within this general context, the frescos of Griselda and Gualtieri in the Camera di Griselda at Roccabianca achieve a confluence of meanings from humanist and chivalric traditions. As part of the artistic commissions of Pier Maria Rossi they confirm his place within the context of the times as an artistic patron and reflect his intellectual interest in contemporary Renaissance ideas.

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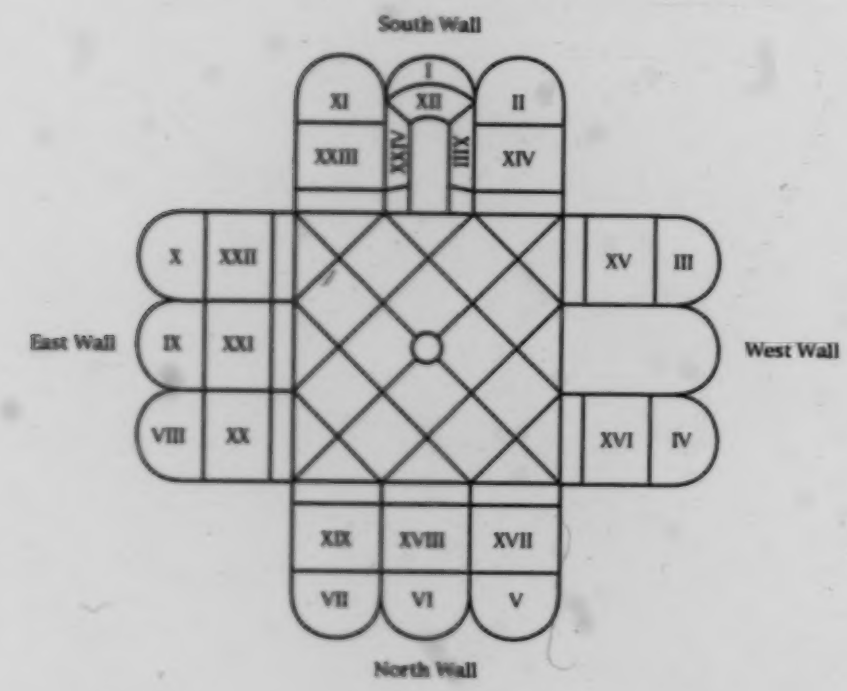
Figure 1

Layout of the Frescoes of the Camera di Griselda



I Gualtieri speaks with his courtiers

II Gualtieri meets Giannucolo in presence of his courtiers

III Preparation of the marriage garments

IV Gualtieri and entourage travel to Griselda's house

V Griselda is approached by Gualtieri

VI Gualtieri asks her father for her hand in marriage

VII Griselda's disrobing

VIII The Marriage ceremony

IX Griselda and Gualtieri travel to his house

X The Marriage banquet

XI Card and game playing

XII Griselda gives birth to her first child

XIII Gualtieri is seized with desire to test Griselda

XIV The first trial

XV Griselda gives birth to her second child

XVI The second trial

XVII Gualtieri's reading of the papal declaration

XVIII Griselda leaves and returns to her father's house

XIX Gualtieri comes to fetch Griselda

XX Griselda meets the Duke, the new bride and her brother

XXI The Banquet scene

XXII Griselda is dressed and meets her children

XXIII Marriage of their daughter

XXIV The Duke of Panago leaves

Figure 2

Castello di Roccabianca

Figure 3

East Wall

Figure 4

South Wall

Figure 5

North Wall

Figure 6
Ceiling of Roccabianca

Figure 7

Detail of Scene XII

Figure 8

Detail of Scene XIII

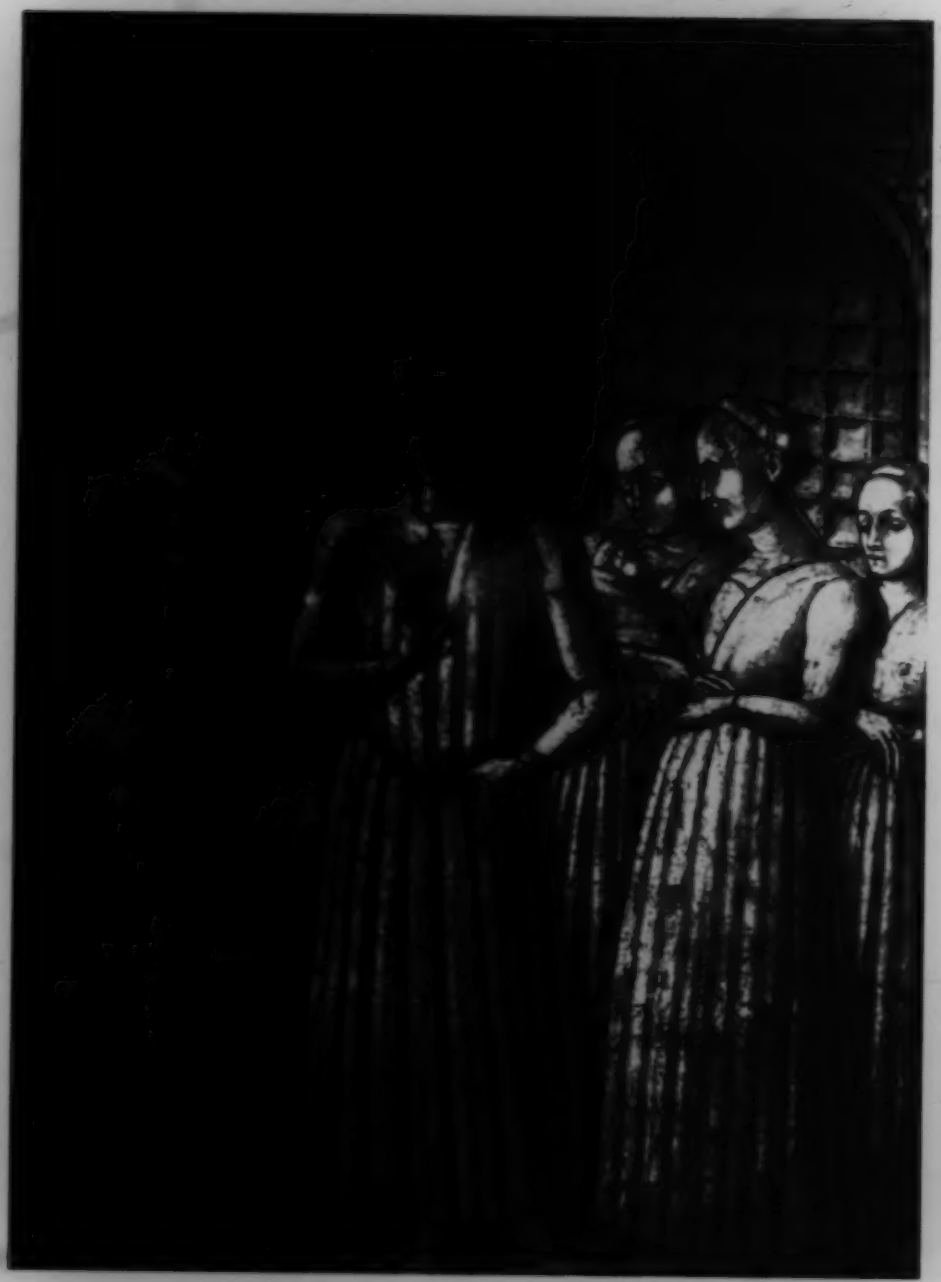


Figure 9

Detail of Scene XV

Figure 10

Torrechiara

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Figure 11

Torrechiara Ceiling

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Figure 12

Medals

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